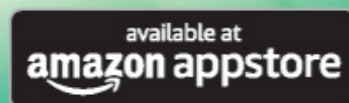
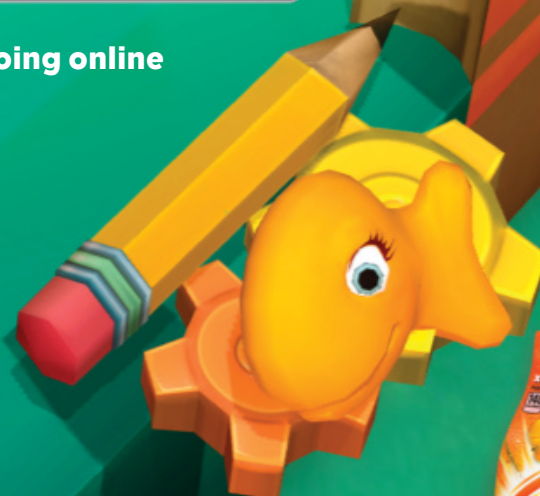


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2019 BASEBALL PREVIEW

Sports Illustrated

KIDS

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LINEUP

**APRIL
2019**

VOLUME 31
NUMBER 3

Photograph by
ADAM GLANZMAN/
GETTY IMAGES



GONE FISHING

If anyone can handle a pitch coming at 105 mph, it's Angels star Mike Trout, who has his sights set on a third MVP and a second playoff appearance.

2019 MAJOR LEAGUE PREVIEW

31 Baseball is back—and the heat is on! More and more flamethrowing pitchers are testing the limits of radar guns. Plus, scouting reports on all 30 teams.

16 PRIME TIME

Banished from Los Angeles after a trying stint with the Lakers, point guard D'Angelo Russell found a home in Brooklyn, where he's blossoming into a big-time star.

20 AGELESS WONDERS

Tom Brady has shown no signs of slowing down in his 40s. But he's not the only player to defy his age.

22 BOUND FOR STARDOM

Overlooked and undersized, Marquise Brown waited his turn while working at an amusement park. Now he's ready to take on the NFL.

44 MJ'S FLU GAME

This NBA playoff season, we're going back in time to check out one of the most iconic performances in Finals history.

FROM THE PAGES OF SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

48 THE LIGHTNING DIARIES

SI went behind the scenes with Lightning coach Jon Cooper and his staff and found that the roots of their success go far deeper than plotting the perfect penalty kill.

COVER

Jeffery A. Salter
Photo Composition by SI Premedia

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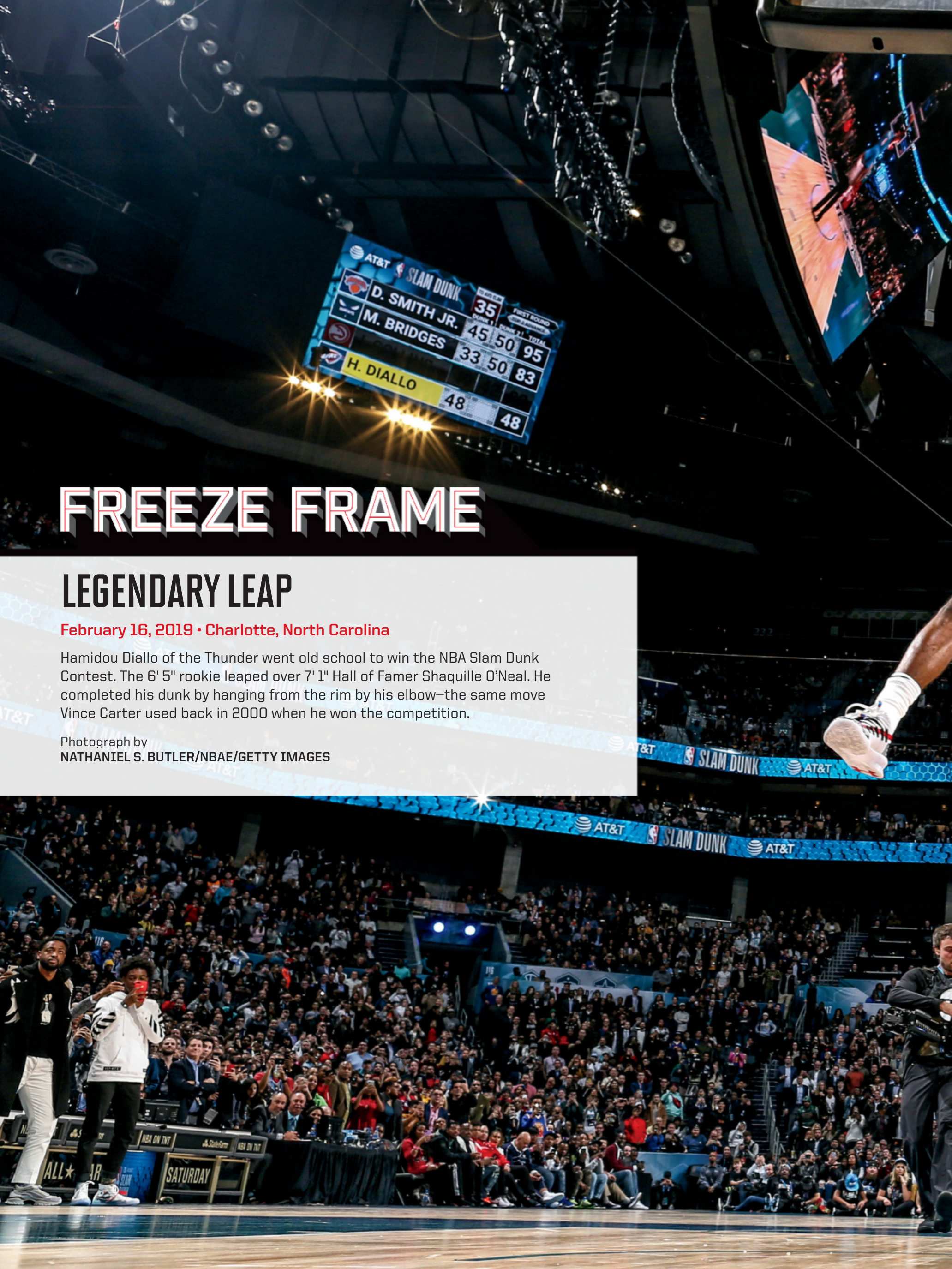
FREEZE FRAME

LEGENDARY LEAP

February 16, 2019 • Charlotte, North Carolina

Hamidou Diallo of the Thunder went old school to win the NBA Slam Dunk Contest. The 6' 5" rookie leaped over 7' 1" Hall of Famer Shaquille O'Neal. He completed his dunk by hanging from the rim by his elbow—the same move Vince Carter used back in 2000 when he won the competition.

Photograph by
NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES



AT&T SLAM DUNK			
D. SMITH JR.	35	FIRST ROUND	
M. BRIDGES	45	50	95
H. DIALLO	33	50	83
	48		48



AT&T SLAM DUNK		FIRST ROUND		TOTAL	
PLAYER	ROUND 1	ROUND 2	ROUND 3	ROUND 4	ROUND 5
D. SMITH JR.	45	50	95		
M. BRIDGES	33	50	83		
H. DIALLO	48				40





MASON LANE

LAS



FREEZE FRAME

BUMPY RIDE

February 16, 2019 • St. Louis, Missouri

Scottie Knapp was dreaming of winning the Professional Bull Riders Mason Lowe Memorial event. Unfortunately, Prankster had other ideas. The bull tossed Knapp well before the eight seconds Knapp needed to stay aboard to score points. Chase Outlaw—a perfect name for a cowboy—won the event.

Photograph by
DAVID E. KLUTHO

Depression. It's not weird between friends.



Maybe you feel kind of isolated. Distant. Like even when you're surrounded by other people, you're alone. Maybe you feel weighed down. And you might feel like that's too weird to talk about. But chances are, your friends won't find it weird at all. They might even be going through something similar. Bring Change to Mind can help you start the conversation. Find out more at BringChangeToMind.org.

let's talk mental health

bring
change
to mind

WARMUP

LONG TIME COMING

Manny Machado finally signed a contract—a 10-year, \$300 million deal with the Padres—in February. Should he have gotten more?



BURNING QUESTION

ARE MLB TEAMS COLLUDING?

BY SAM PAGE

Photograph by
Jennifer Stewart/Getty Images

ALEX RODRIGUEZ ASKED for everything he wanted. When the superstar shortstop first became a free agent at age 25, in 2000, he had a long list of suitors. His demands to the Mets—an office, private-jet trips, his face on billboards all over town—infamously ended negotiations before they started. Still, by December the Rangers had signed Rodriguez to a record 10-year, \$252 million deal.

Eighteen years later another once-in-a-generation free agent in his 20s, Bryce Harper, hit the market. Yet by the time every team's pitchers and

catchers reported to spring training in mid-February, Harper remained unsigned. Other top free agents, like San Diego's Manny Machado, found themselves waiting a long time to ink deals.

What happened? Last season league revenues exceeded \$10 billion. Player salaries, however, went down for the first time since 2004. These contradictory trends have led many—including Rodriguez himself—to allege collusion. In other words, they believe that the owners of all 30 teams are working together to keep player salaries down.

If that sounds far-fetched, bear in mind it's happened before. When Peter Ueberroth took over as MLB commissioner in 1984, he encouraged teams to begin valuing profits over pennants. He set up a system in which the owners would not bid against each other for top free agents, thus lowering salaries for players across the board. Sure, teams would miss out on the opportunity to poach their rivals' best players. But overall, everyone stood to make much more money.

Collusion worked. Kirk Gibson had a career year for the Tigers in 1985,

batting .287 with 29 home runs. He heard the Royals were interested in signing him as a free agent. But after Kansas City's interest suddenly evaporated, he was forced to re-sign with Detroit. Andre Dawson won MVP with the Cubs in 1987 after telling Chicago he'd sign with them for whatever salary they wanted.

Is a similar conspiracy to blame for Harper, Machado, and Craig Kimbrel having such a tough time finding homes? Maybe not.

Multiple factors may be curbing teams' appetites for megadeals. The progress of advanced statistics has given teams more exact valuations on players. When general managers have precise numbers for what they believe a player is worth, they're going to be less likely to go very far over that dollar value.

Then there's the luxury tax. While baseball doesn't have a salary cap, it does have a penalty for teams that



RIGGED GAME

MLB commissioner Peter Ueberroth urged owners to collude in the '80s to drive payroll costs down.

spend past a certain level. Last season, only the Nationals and the Red Sox paid the luxury tax. They combined for a total bill of just \$14.3 million—the

lowest total since the current system began. If even the Yankees won't pay the tax, why should anyone else?

Even if players think teams are colluding, it'll be hard to prove. More likely is that the issue will be resolved in 2021, when the current collective bargaining agreement expires. Still, the days of the A-Rod free agency may be over. We may never see a player request his face on every billboard in town ever again.

UNBOXED

Taking the lid off the coolest sports gear.

When he was growing up, Donovan Mitchell's love of dunking—and his seemingly superhuman jumping ability—earned him the nickname *Spida*. Now in his second year with the Jazz, Mitchell recently unveiled his new signature Adidas shoe, called **D.O.N. Issue #1**. (D.O.N. stands for Determination Over Negativity.) Mitchell is a big fan of



Spider-Man; in December he wore a Peter Parker-inspired outfit to a game. So it's no surprise that the shoes have a red-and-blue color scheme and a web logo on the tongue. Mitchell unveiled the shoe

on adidas.com. He worked with his old high school to find a pair of young aspiring sportswriters to interview him. "I want to help inspire kids so they feel like they can do anything," he said of the message in the shoe's name.

"You don't have to be the No. 1 recruit, you don't even have to be a basketball player. I just want this to send a positive message to make kids feel inspired that they can be what they want to be."



WATCH

TEAM USA

WOMEN'S HOCKEY WORLDS

(Check local listings)

At last year's Olympics, the United States beat Canada 3-2 in the gold medal game. At this year's world championships, those two powerhouses will have more competition than ever, as the field of teams expands from eight to 10. France won the Division I Group A tournament last year and earned promotion to the top division. They'll debut in a crowded field in Finland, as the Americans attempt to defend as world champions.



Denver Nuggets vs. Golden State Warriors

(April 2, TNT, 10:30 p.m. ET)

The Warriors have dominated the Western Conference all season—that's no shock. But the Denver Nuggets' success? A pleasant surprise. This potential conference finals preview is one the most intriguing games of the regular season's final month.

Poetic License

*Niners are red.
Giants are blue.
Submit to
this contest
And we might
just pick you!*

April is National Poetry Month. So for the second year in a row, we're asking for your best sports-related verses. Rhyming is no longer mandatory!



Submit your caption at sikidsmailbox@gmail.com. Your entry could appear in a future issue of the magazine.



APRIL BIRTHDAYS

1 ▶ The Bucks' **Brook Lopez** and the Bulls' **Robin Lopez** are 31 years old.

8 First baseman **Yonder Alonso** of the Chicago White Sox is 32.

10 Indians pitcher **Corey Kluber** turns 33.

13 **Rasmus Dahlin** of the Buffalo Sabres is 19.

14 ▶ Cleveland Browns quarterback **Baker Mayfield** celebrates his 24th birthday.

16 Point guard **Reggie Jackson** of the Detroit Pistons is 29.

19 ▶ The Red Sox' **Jackie Bradley Jr.** turns 29 years old.

20 ATP Tour tennis player **Alexander Zverev** is 22.

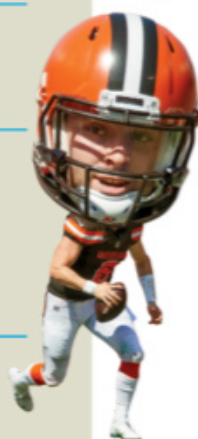
22 Team USA and Calgary Inferno hockey star **Kacey Bellamy** turns 32.

24 Australian tennis player **Ashleigh Barty** is 23 years old.

27 ▶ San Diego Chargers wide receiver **Keenan Allen** celebrates his 27th birthday.

28 Bruins center **David Krejci** is 33.

30 ▶ **Seimone Augustus** of the Minnesota Lynx turns 35.



ON OUR RADAR

CLAIRE TUGGLE

HEIGHT: 5'9"

BIRTHPLACE: CLOVIS, CALIFORNIA

BIRTH DATE: JULY 8, 2004

SPORT: SWIMMING

■ At the National Championships last July, Claire swam the second-fastest 200-meter freestyle time by an American female in the 13–14 age group. Her time of 1:58.59 was just .06 seconds behind the original record, set in 1978.

■ At the Junior Pan-Pacific Swimming Championships in Fiji last August, Claire set a personal best in the 200 free, winning a gold medal with a time of 1:58.58. She also swam the opening leg of the gold-medal-winning

4×200 relay team, which set a meet record. She took home silver in the 400 free, finishing in 4:10.31.

■ At the Junior Nationals in July, Claire won gold in three events—the 400 free and the 200- and 400-meter individual medleys—and was the runner-up in the 200 free.

■ Claire owns eight national age-group records, setting three marks in the under-10 and five in the 11–12. In 2018 she had the top times in 10 events in her age group, and was second in another.

SPORTSKIDS OF THE MONTH

DEEGAN IREY, 10

San Diego, California
DIRT-TRACK RACING

Deegan has won three straight season championships (at three different levels) at the Barona Speedway. In 2018, he won the overall title in the junior sprint category. He also won Rookie of the Year.



SOPHIA MIZE, 12

Ooltewah, Tennessee
SOCCER

Sophia scored 25 goals, including six hat tricks, in 11 games, to lead the Hunter Middle School team to a runner-up finish in the Hamilton County East District. She also had 11 assists and played in the district All-Star game.



RYAN WILLIAMS, 15

Corona, California
TRACK AND FIELD

Ryan won the long jump at the CNUSD Intermediate Track Championships, leaping 17' 7" for the win. He also finished second in the 200 meters. As a volleyball player, he led his Mavericks 14 Black to the 2018 Boys Summer Classic title.



ARE YOU A SPORTSKID?

If you think you have what it takes to be a SportsKid of the Month, submit your nomination at:
SIKIDS.com/SportsKid



SPARE TIME



SOUND WAVES

Seven-time world champion surfer **STEPHANIE GILMORE** turns her downtime into jam sessions. *By Jeremy Fuchs*

SURFING COMPETITIONS NEED

great waves. And sometimes the best waves don't coincide with the tournament schedule. That can lead to some downtime. So how does a surfer stay busy? Stephanie Gilmore picks up her guitar and plays.

Gilmore, a 31-year-old from Australia who won her record-tying seventh world title last November, has been playing guitar for more than 20 years, around the same amount of time she's been surfing. "When I think of it like that, actually, I should be way better than I am," she says with a laugh. "My dad played a little bit and I just picked it up and absolutely loved it."

On tour, Gilmore will get with a group of fellow surfers and friends and jam. Or sometimes, if there's a concert at the competition, the band will bring Gilmore



and other surfers up onstage to come play. Most of the music is hard rock. "Surfing has always got that tagline of that chilled-out ukulele sound," she says. "But when I think of the music I grew up listening to, it was all punk."

In addition to playing, Gilmore, who travels frequently during the year, loves exploring new cities and checking out new gear. "I'm always trying to find guitars around the world," says Gilmore, who surfed in Australia, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, France, and the U.S. last season.

Gilmore is attempting to qualify for the 2020 Olympics, which will be the first Games to feature surfing. She'd love a gold medal, but she's also got another award on her mind: "A Grammy for sure!" she says. "That would be so sick."



Houston Texans Quarterback DESHAUN WATSON'S FAVORITE THINGS



FOOD
Chinese



ICE CREAM
Cookies and cream



SPORT OTHER THAN FOOTBALL
Basketball

CARTOON
Hey Arnold!



ACTOR
Will Smith



ATHLETE GROWING UP
Tim Tebow

EMOJI



MUSICAL ARTIST
Future



SUBJECT IN SCHOOL
Math



AUTHOR
Dr. Seuss

Interview by Kid Reporter Michael Nichols

HISTORY

GOOD CALL

For every memorable sports moment, there is an eager announcer hoping to channel the excitement. Some descriptions fall flat. Others become iconic. Can you match the game to its famous call?



1.



Al Michaels

"Do you believe in miracles? Yes!"

2.



Jack Buck

"I don't believe what I just saw!"

3.



Mark Boyle

"Ring the bell, baby! Ding dong, the witch is dead!"

4.



Gus Johnson

"The slipper still fits!"

5.



Joe Starkey

"Oh, my god! The most amazing, sensational, dramatic, heart-rending, exciting, thrilling finish in the history of [the sport]."

A.



1988 Kirk Gibson's home run, Game 1 of the World Series.

B.



1982 Cal uses five laterals as time expires to knock off Stanford.

C.



1999 Gonzaga stuns Florida to reach the Elite Eight.

D.



1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team beats the favored Soviets.

E.



1995 The Pacers beat the Knicks in the Eastern Conference semifinals.



Submit your caption at **SIKIDS.com/FunnyPhoto**. Your entry could appear in a future issue of the magazine.

FUNNY PHOTO

The winning caption from SIKIDS.com:



"THESE FEEL LESS DEFLATED THAN USUAL."

— RAYA, 13, MICHIGAN

"So this doesn't count as three touchdowns?"

— Lukas, 11, New York

"Go small! I mean, go long!"

— Nicklaus, 11, Virginia

"When did my hands get so big?"

— Ari, 11, California

"Aw, baby footballs! I will name you Gronk Jr., Tom, Julian, and Stephon."

— Carter, 10, North Carolina

"So you're sure these aren't edible?"

— Xavier, 12, Kansas

"Tom, you can play until you're 60 if you use these."

— Kian, 7, Michigan

SOUND OFF

What trend are you so over?

Fortnite Dances. There needs to be a new trend. Tarik Cohen, my teammate, he plays too much *Fortnite* and he does the dances at practice.

MITCHELL TRUBISKY

Chicago Bears quarterback*

*Interview by
Kid Reporter
Michael Nichols

Those little Gucci bags. What are they called? Man pouches! I am so over those. I'm trying to convince myself to stop!

MELVIN GORDON

Los Angeles Chargers running back*

Men bleaching their hair. I've had to come into the locker room every day for two months straight and look at two of my teammates, who've both recently bleached their hair. I think they look like buffoons with little vanilla ice cream cones on top of their heads.

WALKER ZIMMERMAN

LAFC defender



HOME SWEET HOME

Russell earned his first All-Star Game selection, and he's set multiple career highs in his second season in Brooklyn.

Photograph by
Nathaniel S. Butler/
NBAE/Getty Images

A full-page photograph of D'Angelo Russell in a Brooklyn Nets jersey, number 33, on a basketball court. He is looking towards the right side of the frame. The background shows the court floor and some arena seating.

D'Angelo RUSSELL

TEAM

Brooklyn Nets

POSITION

Point Guard

SPOTLIGHT

Banished after a failed stint with the Lakers, the former Ohio State point guard found a home in Brooklyn, where he's blossoming into a big-time star.

BY ALAA ABDELDAIEM

He knew the call was coming, but D'Angelo Russell still had to let it sink in. It was the first day of February and Russell was coming off another strong performance, this time a 25-point outing in a 117-114 loss to the San Antonio Spurs. The 6' 5" Brooklyn Nets guard was playing the best basketball of his young career, so there was no reason to be surprised when he heard the news.

But as he sat there on the team's flight to Orlando, replaying what his coach had just told him seconds earlier, Russell's emotions came through. The moment he'd been dreaming of had just become reality. He was an NBA All-Star.

"I was in awe on the plane," said Russell. "I'm a crier, honestly. I was holding my tears in." There was a reason for the tears. At just 22, he's already experienced his fair share of upheaval.

ROUGH START

An All-America selection in his freshman season at Ohio State, Russell was drafted second overall by the Lakers in 2015. Despite being just 19 years old, there were high expectations. He was featured on the cover of *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* before his rookie season, as the student being mentored by Kobe Bryant. The idea was that Russell was going to follow in Bryant's footsteps and become the next in a long line of Lakers stars. Russell showed flashes of potential as a scorer and passer early on, and he even made the All-Rookie team. But by his second year in Los Angeles, Russell's career started on a different trajectory.

His attitude was questioned. Lakers president of basketball operations Magic Johnson didn't try to hide his displeasure with Russell. "What I needed was a leader," Johnson said. "I needed somebody also that can make the others players better and also that players want to play with." Russell had a public falling-out with one of his teammates, and coaches questioned his maturity.

After Russell averaged 14.3 points and 4.0 assists in two seasons in Los Angeles, the Lakers decided it was best to move on. They traded Russell during the 2017 offseason to Brooklyn in a deal for Brook Lopez and a first-round draft pick that became Kyle Kuzma.

Russell accepted his fate without hesitation. In fact, he was looking forward to it, a fresh start in a new city. But Russell's early days in Brooklyn didn't look promising. He missed nearly half of his first season with injuries, and he struggled with turnovers, averaging a career-high 3.1 per game despite playing a career-low 25.7 minutes per game.

As he sat for two months last



HIGH FLYING

Russell has been the catalyst on a surprising Nets team, helping to push a number of players to new heights.

season after he underwent arthroscopic surgery on his left knee, Russell could hear the words

in his head. They were the same ones that hounded him for years.

Talented but inconsistent. Discarded from the team that drafted him.

But Russell was having none of it. The upcoming season was his to own, and nothing was going to get in his way. "I trust my craft," Russell said. "I trust my craft, and I knew what I was capable of."

Russell has certainly showed that this year. Russell has averaged career highs in points (20.0), assists (6.6), field goal percentage (.436) and three-point percentage (.374) through 57 games this season.

"There's no fear," Kenny Atkinson, Brooklyn's coach, said of Russell's recent play. "He believes in himself. He's got tremendous, tremendous confidence."

His teammates knew he had it in him, too. The leadership that was doubted? The maturity some said he

didn't have? Jarrett Allen, Brooklyn's 6' 11" center, sees a different picture, one in which Russell makes an impact even if he isn't scoring. It's a picture that showcases the 22-year-old's diverse skill set, in which he's making passes from different angles for easy layups, driving and freezing defenders with ball fakes and using his vision to thread passes through tight windows. One in which Russell is the selfless, energizing leader the Nets needed.

"He's been through a lot, but he's grown because of it," said Allen. "Even when he doesn't have a good game or when he's off, and someone else needs to take his place, he's still doing stuff others don't see, on the bench talking to us, helping us out, making defensive and offensive readings. It says a lot about his selflessness, and it gives us a lot of energy. It shows us that—even though when he has a bad game, he could easily just be pouty and sad—he wants to be a part of the team and see us improve and be in the game. That's growth right there."

Veteran guard Joe Harris agreed, praising Russell's embodiment of the

team's spirit. "He is the lifeblood of [the Nets]," said Harris. "Everything flows through him. He does a really good job of dictating the pace, getting guys in rhythm and just doing a really good job on every level. He does a really good job facilitating for others and himself. Obviously we are really lucky to have a player of his caliber on our team."

CLEAN SLATE

The Nets are one of the biggest surprises of the season. They've surpassed all expectations and are in the mix for a playoff spot. They even weathered an eight-game losing streak in November and have stayed afloat despite multiple injuries to key players such as guards Spencer Dinwiddie and Caris Levert. Russell has fit into a culture that allows various players to shine.

"I have been through so much," said Russell. "I didn't know how to be a professional. So to come around this organization, they nurtured [and taught me] how to be a professional. You're around it every day. There's no let-offs. I needed that, that reassurance, and that humbling experience. I know how far I've come."

Russell was excited for the All-Star Game, of course. "I'm going to be starstruck," he said shortly before he left for Charlotte, where he scored six points. "I'm not going to lie. I'm 22. A lot of these guys are older than me, so I watched them on TV. I dreamed of playing in that game." But he's more excited about the journey he is on with the Nets. "To get this opportunity, I'm lost for words," Russell said. "The coaches that I've had, my teammates that I've met throughout this journey, it's something that you can't take away. It almost feels like a degree. You can't take that away from somebody."

MOVING ON UP

Sometimes a change of scenery is needed to jolt a player out of their doldrums. Here are three players who, like D'Angelo Russell, have benefitted from packing their bags and finding a new home.



JULIUS RANDLE

NEW ORLEANS PELICANS

After a broken leg limited him to one game in his rookie season, Randle improved over the next three years with the Lakers. But it wasn't until he signed with New Orleans last offseason that the 6' 9" power forward took off. He's averaging career highs in minutes played and points scored.



RICKY RUBIO

UTAH JAZZ

Rubio came into the league in 2011 with sky-high expectations. His play with Minnesota was inconsistent, at best. Traded to Utah in 2017, Rubio has become a better and more consistent scorer. The native of Spain has transformed into a dependable point guard on a good team.



DERRICK ROSE

MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES

Rose has been on a basketball road trip since tearing his ACL in 2012, traveling from Chicago to New York to Cleveland and, for 48 hours, to Utah. But he's found a permanent home in Minnesota. The former MVP is averaging his highest point total since 2012, and even scored a career-best 50 points on Halloween 2018.

Ageless *WONDERS*

Tom Brady has shown no signs of slowing down into his 40s. But he's not the first senior star to show up athletes half his age. These six didn't have time for a midlife crisis. **BY SAM PAGE**

GORDIE HOWE → PLAYED UNTIL: 52

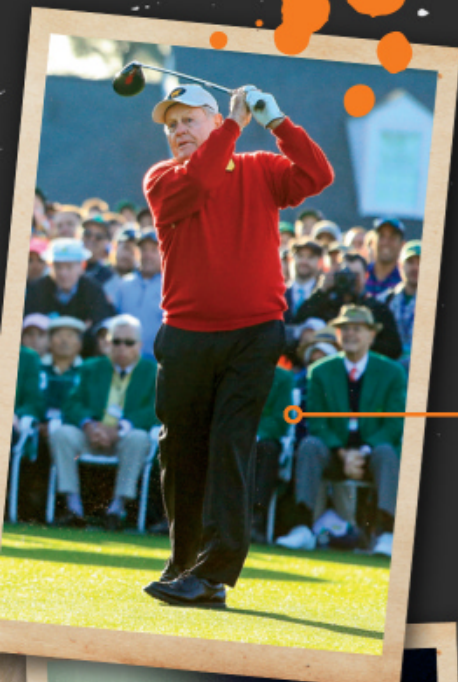
After 25 seasons in Detroit, four Stanley Cups, and an NHL-record 1,809 points, Mr. Hockey retired at age 42. Three years later, however, in 1973, Howe joined the fledgling World Hockey Association to play with his sons Mark and Marty for the Houston Aeros. Dad outscored both of his sons that season, and led the team with 100 points. The Howes stuck together and joined the New England Whalers four years later. When the WHA dissolved, the Whalers joined the NHL, and the league got its biggest legend back. Howe scored his final NHL goal at age 52, on an assist from Mark.

JAMIE MOYER → PLAYED UNTIL: 49

Jamie Moyer's career could have easily ended in 1992, when he was 29. The Cardinals had released him a season before. The Cubs had cut him after spring training. And he spent the entire 1992 campaign in the minors. Moyer's father-in-law floated the idea of getting a real job. Moyer didn't listen. And the next year, at age 30, he went 12-9 with a 3.43 ERA for the Orioles. At 38, he won 20 games for the first time, in Seattle. At 40, he made his first All-Star team. He won the World Series with the Phillies at 45. The soft-tossing Moyer holds the all-time record for home runs allowed with 522—that happens when you pitch until you're 49.



JACK NICKLAUS → PLAYED UNTIL: 65



At the 1986 Masters, sportswriters took to calling golf's "Golden Bear" the "Olden Bear." Turns out this ursine legend still had claws. After a pedestrian performance in the first two rounds, he displayed a veteran calm down the stretch, hitting birdie after birdie on the back nine of the final round. He finished at nine under par and won his record sixth Masters, at 46. The dramatic come-from-behind victory came 11 years after his last green jacket and 23 after his first win at Augusta. "I'm not going to quit, guys," Nicklaus said after his historic win. "Maybe I should. Maybe I should say goodbye. Maybe that'd be the smart thing to do. But I'm not that smart." Almost as impressively, he finished sixth at the 1998 Masters, at age 58.

GEORGE BLANDA → PLAYED UNTIL: 48



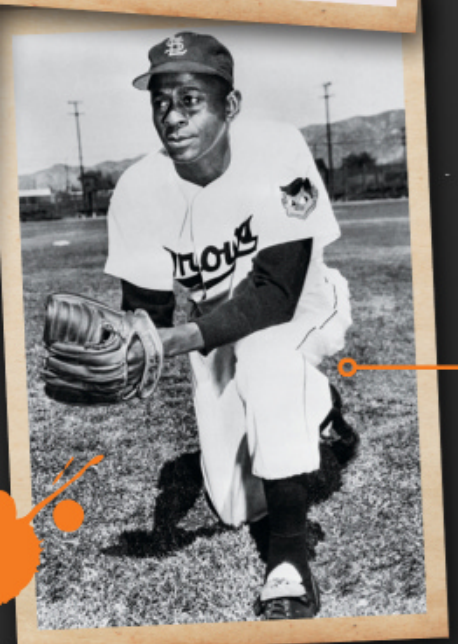
Across sports, certain positions age better than others: knuckleball pitchers, three-point specialists, defensive defensemen. In football, quarterbacks and kickers seem to have the best shot of making it into their 40s. It's no wonder then, that George Blanda, the rare place kicker-quarterback, played for 26 seasons, a pro record. He actually originally retired at age 32 rather than playing just kicker for the Bears. The founding of the AFL in 1959 allowed him to play both positions for the Houston Oilers. At age 34, he led the team to an AFL championship, accounting for all his team's points in a 10-3 win over San Diego. He spent his 40s with the Raiders, as a kicker and backup QB.

JAROMIR JAGR → PLAYED UNTIL: 47



While Tom Brady's TB12 system gets more press, the Jaromir Jagr approach to aging gracefully is equally effective—and even more unorthodox. The secret? Practicing your own way, and whenever your body tells you to. As the elder statesman of a very young Florida Panthers team from 2015 to '17, Jagr earned a reputation for skating after midnight, wearing a 45-pound vest, and dunking his head in an ice bath between periods. There was a method to the madness: In 2016-17, he reached the 60-point plateau at 44, making him the oldest player to ever achieve the feat. Jagr played six NHL seasons in his 40s, amassing 268 points in 387 games. When the Calgary Flames cut him last season, he didn't quit—he just kept playing in Europe.

SATCHEL PAIGE → PLAYED UNTIL: 59



Paige—who was a major league All-Star well into his 40s after spending two decades in the Negro leagues—was asked for advice on longevity. He famously said, "Age is a question of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter." His additional tips appeared in *Collier's* magazine. They included "Avoid fried meats, which angry up the blood," and "Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you." No one ever caught up to Paige. He pitched in the minors in his 50s and made his final appearance in the big leagues at age 59 for the Kansas City A's. He emerged from a rocking chair next to the bullpen (seriously) to throw three shutout innings.



BOUND FOR

*Overlooked and undersized,
Marquise Brown waited his turn
while working at an amusement park.
Now he's ready to take on the NFL.*

STAR

BY MICHAEL
MCKNIGHT

W

hen he was in junior college, Marquise Brown had a job as a ride operator at Six Flags Magic Mountain. When he worked on a ride called Full Throttle, he enjoyed amping up the thrill quotient. "I'd go, 'Five, four, three'—and then I'd stop," he says. "Then I'd say, 'Y'all want me to keep counting?' and before they could respond I'd hit the button and the ride would take off." The wide receiver, who is projected to be taken in the first round of this month's NFL draft, can't hold back a laugh at the memory of all those bugged eyes.

Each ride operator at Magic Mountain is encouraged to be creative. "Sometimes I switched it up," Brown recalls. But usually he pulled his countdown trick, distracting guests to enhance the shock of Full Throttle's initial rocket-like ascent.

Brown's own climb, to becoming one of the draft's most highly-sought-after receivers, has only been a little bit slower.

FULL SPEED AHEAD

Brown's lightning-quickness makes him a potential big-time deep threat in the NFL.

In 2014, during his senior season at Chaminade-Madonna College Prep in Hollywood, Fla., Brown's weight hovered around 140 pounds. He was also just 5' 10". Coaches at large programs weren't exactly beating down

his door. Ted Iacenda, head coach at College of the Canyons, in Santa Clarita, California, was recruiting a teammate of Brown's in 2015. The coach heard that the recruit had a friend who could play, too.

Iacenda and his staff were impressed. They tried to sign Brown before the 2015 season, but Brown's mom was apprehensive about sending her son all the way to California. By the end of that year, during which Brown didn't play football at all,

his mother's fears had subsided enough to put him on a plane headed west. "The second I met him, I was like, 'This kid's tiny!'" Iacenda says. "But when he gets on the field you're like, 'Wow!' He has a step that not many people on this earth have."

California junior colleges don't offer scholarships, so Brown had to find a way to make ends meet while pursuing his dream of playing

RD DOM

for a Power 5 school. Iacenda directed him to the nearby Six Flags. Brown, who walked to work, started out at Bugs Bunny World before moving on to bigger rides.

His performance on the football field earned him a ticket to Oklahoma, where his 1,095 receiving yards in 2017 were 10th-best in



I don't worry about size or getting hit," Brown said. "You can't hit what you can't catch."

team history. In 2018, he was a first-team All-America.

Brown's calling card is his speed. "I don't worry about size or getting hit," he said. "You can't hit what you can't catch." Though he has long been known as "Jet" back home in Florida, he picked up a new nickname after his time in California: Hollywood. With his big personality and his big-play potential, the new moniker should serve him well in the NFL.

MOCK DRAFT

We have you covered with our look at the first round (left). Need more? Take a look back in time at the best ever pick at each slot. **BY GARY GRAMLING**

1. Arizona Cardinals

Nick Bosa, DE, Ohio State

2. San Francisco 49ers

Josh Allen, OLB/DE, Kentucky

3. New York Jets

Rashan Gary, DE/DT, Michigan

4. Oakland Raiders

Quinnen Williams, DT, Alabama

5. Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Ed Oliver, DT, Houston

6. New York Giants

Dwayne Haskins, QB, Ohio State

7. Jacksonville Jaguars

Drew Lock, QB, Missouri

8. Detroit Lions

T.J. Hockenson, TE, Iowa

9. Buffalo Bills

Jonah Williams, OT/G, Alabama

10. Denver Broncos

Devin White, LB, LSU

11. Cincinnati Bengals

Jachai Polite, OLB/DE, Florida

12. Green Bay Packers

Montez Sweat, OLB/DE, Mississippi State

13. Miami Dolphins

Kyler Murray, QB, Oklahoma

14. Atlanta Falcons

Cody Ford, OT/G, Oklahoma

15. Washington Redskins

Daniel Jones, QB, Duke

16. Carolina Panthers

Greedy Williams, CB, LSU

17. Cleveland Browns

Clelin Ferrell, DE, Clemson

18. Minnesota Vikings

Jawaan Taylor, OT/G, Florida

19. Tennessee Titans

Christian Wilkins, DT, Clemson

20. Pittsburgh Steelers

Deandre Baker, CB, Georgia

21. Seattle Seahawks

Dre'Mont Jones, DT, Ohio State

22. Baltimore Ravens

D.K. Metcalf, WR, Mississippi

23. Houston Texans

Andre Dillard, OT, Washington State

24. Oakland Raiders

Nasir Adderley, S, Delaware

25. Philadelphia Eagles

Josh Jacobs, RB, Alabama

26. Indianapolis Colts

Brian Burns, OLB/DE, Florida State

27. Oakland Raiders

Devin Bush, LB, Michigan

28. Los Angeles Chargers

Dexter Lawrence, DT, Clemson

29. Kansas City Chiefs

Byron Murphy, CB, Washington

30. Green Bay Packers

Marquise Brown, WR, Oklahoma

31. Los Angeles Rams

Jaylon Ferguson, DE, Louisiana Tech

32. New England Patriots

Irv Smith Jr., TE, Alabama

1. Peyton Manning, QB, Tennessee
Indianapolis Colts (1998)

2. Lawrence Taylor, OLB, North
Carolina New York Giants (1981)

3. Anthony Muñoz, OT, USC
Cincinnati Bengals (1980)

4. Joe Greene, DT, North Texas State
Pittsburgh Steelers (1969)

5. Delon Sanders, CB, Florida State
Atlanta Falcons (1989)

6. Jim Brown, FB, Syracuse
Cleveland Browns (1957)

7. Adrian Peterson, RB, Oklahoma
Minnesota Vikings (2007)

8. Ronnie Lott, S, USC,
San Francisco 49ers (1981)

9. Luke Kuechly, LB, Boston College
Carolina Panthers (2012)

10. Rod Woodson, CB, Purdue
Pittsburgh Steelers (1987)

11. J.J. Watt, DE/DT, Wisconsin
Houston Texans (2011)

12. Herb Adderley, CB, Michigan State
Green Bay Packers (1961)

13. Tony Gonzalez, TE, California
Kansas City Chiefs (1997)

14. Darrelle Revis, CB, Pittsburgh
New York Jets (2007)

15. Alan Page, DT, Notre Dame
Minnesota Vikings (1967)

16. Jerry Rice, WR, Mississippi Valley State
San Francisco 49ers (1985)

17. Emmitt Smith, RB, Florida
Dallas Cowboys (1990)

18. Art Monk, WR, Syracuse
Washington Redskins (1980)

19. Randall McDaniel, G, Arizona State
Minnesota Vikings (1988)

20. Jack Youngblood, DE, Florida
Los Angeles Rams (1971)

21. Randy Moss, WR, Marshall
Minnesota Vikings (1998)

22. Ernie Stautner, DT, Boston College
Pittsburgh Steelers (1950)

23. Ozzie Newsome, TE, Alabama
Cleveland Browns (1978)

24. Aaron Rodgers, QB, California
Green Bay Packers (2005)

25. Ted Washington, DT, Louisville
San Francisco 49ers (1991)

26. Ray Lewis, LB, Miami (Fla.)
Baltimore Ravens (1996)

27. Dan Marino, QB, Pittsburgh
Miami Dolphins (1983)

28. Darrell Greene, CB, Texas A&I
Washington Redskins (1983)

29. Fran Tarkenton, QB, Georgia
Minnesota Vikings (1961)

30. Sam Huff, LB, West Virginia
New York Giants (1956)

31. Curley Culp, DT, Arizona State
Denver Broncos (1968)

32. Drew Brees, QB, Purdue
San Diego Chargers (2001)



WE WILL NOT ROLL OVER.

EXCEPT FOR BELLY RUBS.



Now is not the time to roll over, it's time to adopt change. Every day, more than 4,100 dogs and cats are killed in shelters across the country — but **with Best Friends Animal Society leading the way, and your support, we can help our nation's shelters and Save Them All.**

save-them-all.org



**SAVE
THEM
ALL**



In schools to unlock potential.

At the beginning of his freshman year, Jalen’s ambition wavered. He lost sight of his goals and found himself straying from his path. Toriano from Communities In Schools became his trusted guide, working with Jalen to improve his attendance, raise his GPA and set clear goals for the future. Now a senior, Jalen is a first-chair trombone player and drum major in his high school marching band. He’s exploring musical scholarship opportunities for college, and he has dreams of becoming a U.S. Marshal. There are millions of at-risk kids like Jalen who need a caring adult to help them stay in school and succeed in life.

See how we help all kids succeed.

CommunitiesInSchools.org



POSTER FACE OFF



BEN
SIMMONS
Philadelphia 76ers, guard

JACOB
DEGROM
New York Mets, pitcher

22	AGE	30
6'10", 230 pounds	HEIGHT, WEIGHT	6'4", 180 pounds
Melbourne, Australia	HOMETOWN	Ormond Beach, Florida
Big Ben	NICKNAME	The deGrominator
Prior to being drafted, wrote a letter to his father, Dave, a former pro player in Australia. "Because of your hard work, I have opportunities that you didn't have, and for that I am grateful beyond words," it read.	THANKS, POPS	Dad (Tony), a phone company lineman, built a batting cage in the backyard and threw to Jacob (who was originally a shortstop) every day.
Favorite activity as a child in Australia was to visit Nobbys Beach in Newcastle, where he would go fishing.	ON THE WATER	Is an avid boater and bass fisherman. His biggest catch was a six-pound largemouth. He told SI KIDS that he and fellow Met Steven Matz go fishing four or five times a week during spring training.
When the 76ers' sales team hit its goal of 2,800 season tickets two years ago, Jake Reynolds, the senior vice president of sales, celebrated by having Simmons's face shaved into the back of his head.	HAIR STORY	Was known for his flowing locks. After a hitter was quoted in 2016 as saying deGrom's flying hair made it hard to see the ball coming out his hand, the pitcher vowed to never cut it. But before last season he chopped it off.
Former LSU roommate jokingly told an interviewer that Simmons was an opera fan, and the story took off. In reality, he likes rap. His first concert was Kanye West, and now he's friends with Philly native Meek Mill.	MUSIC	Favorite singer is country star George Strait. When deGrom takes the mound or comes to the plate, his theme song is "Simple Man," by Lynyrd Skynyrd.

APRIL 2019
Photograph by
GREG NELSON

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

2018-19 Simmons was named an NBA All-Star for the first time. Before the break, he averaged 16.8 points, 9.0 rebounds, and 7.9 assists per game. He had eight triple-doubles and led the 76ers to a 37-21 record.

2017-18 After missing the entire 2016-17 season with a broken foot, Simmons finally made his NBA debut. He had a triple-double in just his fourth game and went on to win the NBA Rookie of the Year Award.

2015-16 The reigning Gatorade National Player of the Year, Simmons enrolled at LSU. He was a consensus first team All-America, and after the season he entered the NBA draft. The 76ers took Simmons with the first overall pick—making him the third player born in Melbourne, Australia, to be the top selection. (Andrew Bogut in 2005 and Kyrie Irving in 2011 were the others.)

BEN SIMMONS

PHILADELPHIA
POINT GUARD



Tencent 腾讯 Tencent

Sports
Illustrated
KIDS

APRIL 2019

Photograph by
MIKE STOBE/GETTY IMAGES

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

2018 Despite winning just 10 games, deGrom took home the National League Cy Young Award. His ERA (1.70) led the majors, and his WAR (10.0) was tops in the NL. The righty was victimized by poor run support all year. In 13 starts in which deGrom went at least seven innings and allowed no more than one earned run, he picked up just five wins.

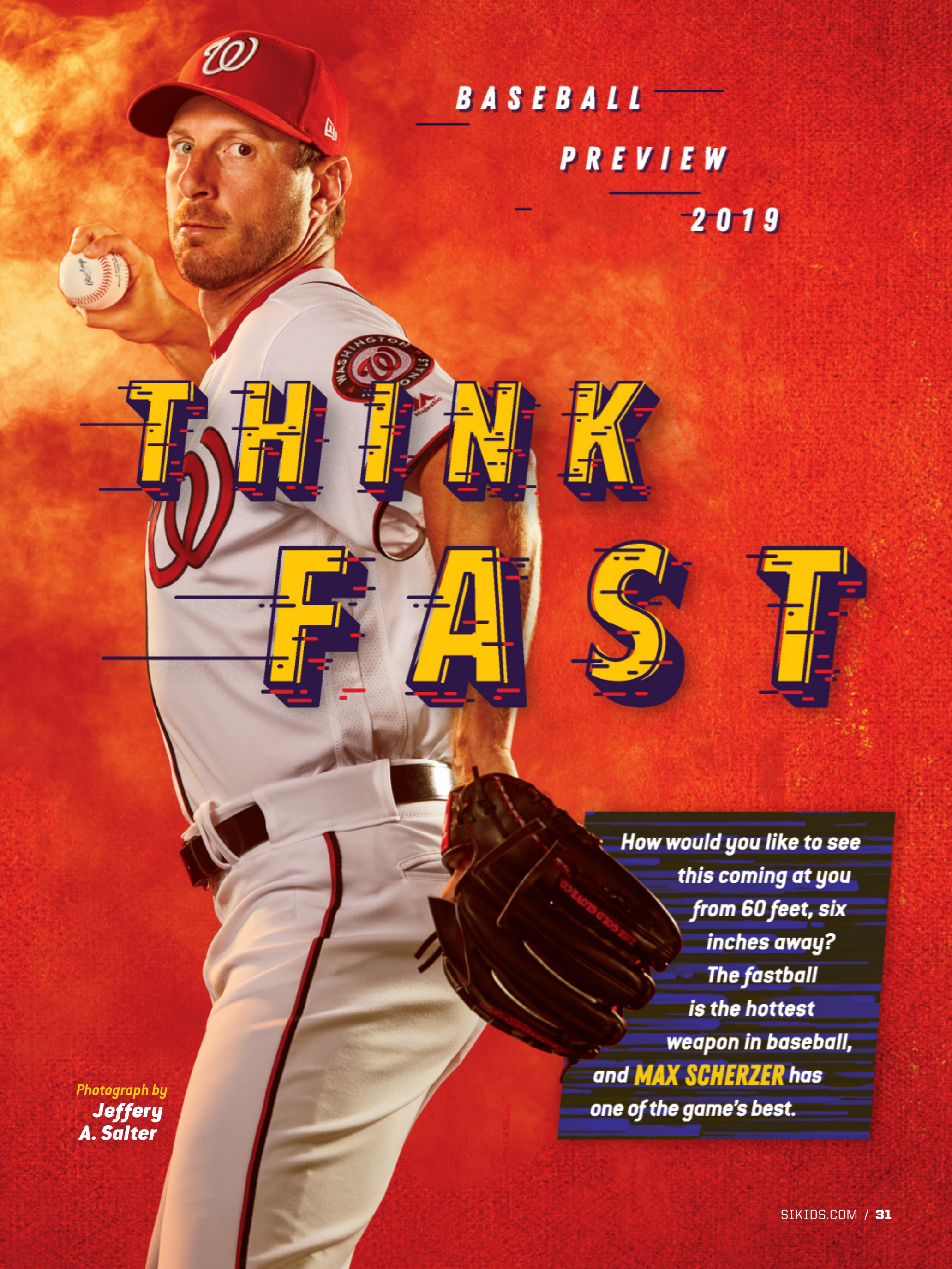
2014 In his his major league debut for the Mets against the Yankees, deGrom pitched seven innings and allowed only one run, but the Mets lost 1-0. He finished the season with a 9-6 record and a 2.69 ERA.

2010 The Mets selected deGrom out of Stetson University in the ninth round of the draft. Originally a shortstop, he moved to the mound for good midway through his junior season.

JACOB DEGROM

NEW YORK METS
PITCHER

Sports
Illustrated
KIDS

A photograph of baseball player Max Scherzer in a white Washington Nationals uniform with red piping and a red cap featuring a white 'W' logo. He is holding a baseball in his right hand and wearing a black baseball glove on his left hand. The background is a fiery orange and red gradient.

BASEBALL

PREVIEW

2019

THINK FAST

How would you like to see this coming at you from 60 feet, six inches away? The fastball is the hottest weapon in baseball, and **MAX SCHERZER** has one of the game's best.

Photograph by
**Jeffery
A. Salter**

BY
MARK
BECHTEL

Jordan Hicks
105.1 mph

In the first
inning of
last year's
All-Star
Game, the

best pitcher in baseball was facing
the best hitter. Max Scherzer of the
Nationals was on the mound, and
Mike Trout of the Angels was at the
plate with a count of 3 and 2.

Television play-by-play announcer
Joe Buck suggested that Scherzer
would throw a slider on the decisive
pitch. But as the camera zoomed in
on catcher Willson Contreras as he
called the pitch, he put down one
finger. Fastball. In the booth, Buck's
partner, John Smoltz, said excitedly,
"He wants to throw the heater!"

Why wouldn't Scherzer? He has
one of the best fastballs in the game,
at a time when baseball has never
been more obsessed with heat.

Consider the at bat before Trout's.
Scherzer struck out José Altuve of

the Astros, the two-time reigning
AL batting champ, on three pitches.
The first was a slider. The second
was a 98-mph fastball up in the
strike zone that Altuve swung at
and missed. The third was another
98-mph scorching fastball that was up
around eye level. He swung
through that one as well.

It was nothing new for Scherzer.
He struck out 300 hitters last
season. In 2016 he fanned a record-
tying 20 in one game. (He actually
had a stretch during which 22 of 27
outs came on whiffs.) The scary
thing is that his fastball, which



SO, JUST HOW FAST IS A FASTBALL?



64.6 mph
Volleyball serve



75.9 mph
Knuckleball



77 mph
Softball pitch

TRIPLE-DIGIT DELIGHT

Chapman's stood alone as baseball's hardest-throwing pitcher for two years, until Hicks equaled his fastest throw.



Aroldis Chapman
105.1 mph

averages about 94 mph but often approaches three digits, isn't even the hardest around.

In 2016 Aroldis Chapman of the Yankees threw a pitch 105.1 mph, the fastest ever recorded. Last year rookie Jordan Hicks of the Cardinals equaled the mark. Tayron Guerrero of the Rays hit 104.

Elite teams are loading up their staffs with flamethrowing pitchers. "I think it's becoming more and more prominent in the game," says Indians pitcher Shane Bieber. "It seems like every arm coming out in the playoffs is 98-plus."

BRINGING THE HEAT

The greatest benefit of a good old country hardball is obvious. The faster the pitch, the more difficult it is for a batter to hit it. Last year, according to MLB's Statcast, which measures every pitch thrown, hitters had a batting average of .295 and a slugging percentage of .511 on fastballs traveling less than 90 mph. For pitches between 90 and 92 mph, the average fell to .282 and the slugging percentage was .478. When you get up to the 94–96 range, the numbers were .262 and .428. And if a pitch was traveling faster than 98 mph, hitters had virtually no chance. They batted .228 while slugging a measly .334.

But a good heater does more than just blow a hitter away. It also makes the rest of a pitcher's arsenal tougher to touch. Consider that at bat Altuve had against Scherzer. The first pitch was an 88-mph slider, which Altuve didn't swing at. It was a nice pitch, but it was made even harder to hit by the fact that Altuve knew that Scherzer was capable of throwing gas. If Altuve went up to

POSITIVE SPIN

Scherzer throws in the high 90s, but the rising effect of his four-seam fastball makes it even tougher for hitters to handle.



JEFF ROBERSON/GETTY IMAGES (HICKS); ERICK W. RASCO (CHAPMAN); SIMON BRUTY (SCHERZER, 3)

 **78.3 mph**
Curveball

 **84.4 mph**
Slider

 **93.2 mph**
Fastball

 **163.7 mph**
Tennis serve

 **201 mph**
Badminton serve

the plate looking for a slider, he would have no time to react if instead he got a screaming fastball. “[Throwing hard] allows you to do more things in terms of attacking hitters and sequencing your pitches,” says Bieber.

Bieber is an interesting case. In college, his fastball was good enough to get past most hitters he faced, but it wasn’t the kind of elite gas that makes scouts drool. His outstanding control was what motivated the Indians to draft him in the fourth round in 2016.

But he saw the benefit of—or maybe even the need to—throw harder in the pros. He made a conscious decision to do so, which loosened up his body and caused his arm slot (the position of his arm during delivery) to naturally rise. **“I think if you try to throw harder, consciously think about trying to be athletic and explosive and strong, your body’s going to naturally do what it needs to do,” he says. By the time he reached the big leagues last year, his fastball was comfortably in the mid-90s. Mixing it in with a slider and a curveball, he fanned 118 hitters in 114 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings.**

Bieber is not the only pitcher who found that simply trying to throw harder can yield results. Charlie Morton’s fastball averaged 92.5 mph in 2015, when he had an ERA of 4.81. Then in an early-season 2016 game, he just decided to let loose. “For some reason,” Morton told Philly.com at the time, “I just went out there and tried to throw the ball hard one game. I wound up throwing it harder.” Last year—as a 34-year-old with the Astros—his average was 95.7 mph and he was



THE HOTTEST OF THE HOT **HOUSTON ASTROS**

Baseball’s hardest-throwing five-man rotation (with an average fastball of 95.0 mph) has ignited World Series hopes in Texas.

DATA COURTESY OF STATCAST

Josh James
**96.9
mph**

fifth in the AL with 10.8 strikeouts per nine innings. He was 15–3 with a 3.13 ERA. In the offseason he signed a two-year contract with the Rays worth \$15 million a season.

MOVING UP

Last year Morton was part of a staff that included Gerrit Cole (whose fastball averaged 96.5 mph) and Justin Verlander (95.0). Even with Morton’s departure, Houston’s starters could be even faster this year with the addition of Josh James. The rookie was called up in September and pitched out of the bullpen in the playoffs, where he regularly exceeded 100 mph and topped out at 102.4.

During the regular season, Cleveland pitcher Trevor Bauer suggested that the Astros were using illegal means to throw more effective

fastballs. He accused Houston pitchers of using a foreign substance to give them better grip on the ball. That wouldn’t necessarily increase their velocity, but it would give them more of something else: spin.

In recent years teams have gained access to a wealth of data about pitches and batted balls, including how fast they spin. When a pitcher releases the ball, the longer his fingers are in contact with the surface, the more backspin he imparts on the pitch. More backspin means that a pitch doesn’t sink as

**YEAH, BUT HOW
FAST IS IT REALLY?**



40 mph
Velociraptor



80 mph
Black marlin



93.2 mph
Fastball



149.1 mph
Formula Rossa
roller coaster

BASEBALL PREVIEW 2019



Framber Valdez
91.9 mph



Collin McHugh
90.3 mph



Gerrit Cole
96.5 mph



Justin Verlander
95.0 mph

fast due to gravity. (That's because the spin creates low pressure above the ball, which creates lift. It's called the Magnus effect, and a similar phenomenon is what gets planes off the ground.)

A pitch with a lot of backspin doesn't actually rise, but it doesn't sink as fast as a hitter expects it to. So it creates the illusion of rising.

For years, pitchers were taught to keep the ball down in the strike zone. But with a better understanding of spin, hard throwers are now challenging hitters with high heat more than ever before.

Many pitchers, Scherzer included, pore over tape of their

“[THROWING HARD] ALLOWS YOU TO DO MORE THINGS IN TERMS OF ATTACKING HITTERS AND SEQUENCING YOUR PITCHES.”

—INDIANS PITCHER SHANE BIEBER



mechanics. Now the video that pitchers have access to is so high-speed that they can slow the image down and see exactly how the ball is coming off their fingertips, which allows them to find the motion that gives them maximum spin. And that leads to maximum results.

Against a fastball with a spin rate between 2,100 and 2,200 revolutions per minute, batters have a slugging percentage of .472. When the spin rate is between 2,500 and 2,600, slugging percentage drops to .407.

Go back to that showdown between Scherzer and Altuve. Scherzer's four-seam fastball has one of the highest average spin rates in the game, nearly 2,500 revolutions per minute. Altuve, who is a disciplined hitter, swung under both fastballs.

That strikeout was one of 25 in the All-Star Game. And while you shouldn't read too much into an exhibition game, there's no denying that hitters are getting blown away more than ever. Major league hitters have set a new record for strikeouts in a season every year since 2008. Meanwhile, after increasing dramatically for four years, home runs dropped by 8.5% last year.

Baseball has long been a power game—and now an increasingly large group of fireballers are giving pitchers the upper hand.

ADAM GLANZMAN/GETTY IMAGES (BIEBER); LESLIE PLAZA JOHNSON/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES (JAMES); ROB TRINGALI/MLB PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES (MCHUGH); MARK CUNNINGHAM/MLB PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES (COLE, VALDEZ); JORDAN NAHOLOWA/MURPH (VERLANDER)

241.7 mph
Peregrine falcon

361 mph
SCMaglev train

767.3 mph
Speed of sound

430,000 mph
NASA Parker solar probe

670,616,629 mph
Speed of light

WE PREDICT

Will the Red Sox repeat? Will Manny make the Padres contenders? Here's what our crystal ball says.



AL

East Winner
NEW YORK YANKEES

Central Winner
CLEVELAND INDIANS

West Winner
HOUSTON ASTROS

Wild Cards
BOSTON RED SOX
OAKLAND A'S

MVP
ALEX BREGMAN

Cy Young
TREVOR BAUER

Rookie of the Year
VLADIMIR GUERRERO JR.

NL

East Winner
WASHINGTON NATIONALS

Central Winner
ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

West Winner
LOS ANGELES DODGERS

Wild Cards
MILWAUKEE BREWERS
CHICAGO CUBS

MVP
MANNY MACHADO

Cy Young
NOAH SYNDERGAARD

Rookie of the Year
PETE ALONSO

*AL
Championship Series*
**ASTROS
OVER YANKEES**

*NL
Championship Series*
**DODGERS
OVER CARDINALS**

World Series:
**ASTROS
OVER
DODGERS**

*We're Not As Certain
About These Things:*

- An unwitting Cubs usher kicks out a fan who brings a goat to a pets night, kicking off that whole curse business all over again.
- Building off the success of last year's "opener" pitcher the Rays try to further innovate by introducing a "middler," but it ends up just being a shorter name for "middle reliever."
- Some team signs Bartolo Colon. (This one might actually happen.)

AL EAST



NEW YORK YANKEES

HOT TOPIC: CAN JAMES PAXTON STAY HEALTHY? Last year with the Seattle Mariners, **James Paxton**, who had been dogged by injuries throughout his first five seasons, made more than 24 starts for the first time in his career. His numbers were stellar: 11 wins and 208 strikeouts in 160 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings. The Yankees acquired him in the offseason for three prospects. He will team with Luis Severino (220 SO) to give New York a potent one-two punch. The bullpen also features a pair of pitchers who can throw 100 mph: Aroldis Chapman and Dellin Betances. Offensively, the Bronx Bombers lived up to their name, smacking a major league—record 267 homers. With so many power arms and power hitters, the Yankees should have the firepower to win baseball's best division.

2

BOSTON RED SOX

HOT TOPIC: WILL EVERYTHING GO RIGHT AGAIN? Last year was a remarkable season for the Red Sox. Several players, including AL MVP **Mookie Betts** (32 HR, .346 BA) and J.D. Martinez (43 HR, .330 BA) had career years. Righty starter Rick Porcello bounced back from a horrible 2017 season to pick up 17 victories. The team largely avoided injury problems. As a result, Boston won a club-record 108 games and cruised through the postseason to win its fourth World Series in 14 years. The trick now is figuring out what to do next. Having the league's highest payroll means Boston has little room to bring in new players, and the bullpen could be an area of concern. The Sox are still loaded with talent, but so are the Yankees. If Boston is going to repeat as division champs, they're going to need some big breaks. Again.



3

TAMPA BAY RAYS

HOT TOPIC: WILL THE OPENER CONTINUE TO WORK MAGIC? Even as a squad that finished third, Tampa Bay was one of the most significant teams in the majors last year. The Rays relied heavily on the "opener" strategy—using a relief pitcher in the first inning to face the top of the opposing lineup. The team's ERA was nearly a run better after the Rays started using the opener. Another reason they adopted the strategy is that **Blake Snell** was their only above-average starter. But he was *waaaaay* above average: 21 wins, a 1.89 ERA, and 221 strikeouts in 180 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings. Free agent DH Avisail García (19 HR with the White Sox) and OF Austin Meadows, a top prospect acquired from the Pirates last summer, should give the Rays' attack enough pop to challenge for a wild-card berth.



4

TORONTO BLUE JAYS

HOT TOPIC: IS MARCUS STROMAN GOING TO BOUNCE BACK? Starting pitcher **Marcus Stroman** was fantastic in 2017, but last year was a season to forget. A shoulder injury and blisters limited him to 19 games, and his ERA ballooned from 3.09 to 5.54. Stroman is one of the few holdovers from the 2016 Blue Jays team that made the AL Championship Series. The team will need him not only to pitch well, but also to be a positive influence around young players. That group could include Vladimir Guerrero Jr. The top prospect in baseball is just 20, but he will likely make his big league debut at some point this season. In 95 minor league games last year, he hit .381 with 20 homers. He's the kind of player a team can build around—in the future.



5

BALTIMORE ORIOLES

HOT TOPIC: CAN IT GET ANY WORSE? Baltimore was bad last year. Really bad. Really, *reaaaally* bad. The Orioles lost 115 games, the fifth-most in major league history. And no player was worse than 1B **Chris Davis**. The slugger, who hit 38 home runs two years ago, had a batting average of .168, struck out 192 times, and had a WAR of -2.8. To his credit, Davis kept playing every day—but the fact that Baltimore didn't have any better options says a lot about how dire the situation is. The Orioles are still rebuilding, and the offseason moves they made indicate that it's going to be a while before they're competitive again. The biggest pickup was **Richie Martin**, who has never played above Double A—yet will likely start at shortstop.

PITCHING STAFF HEAT INDEX



AL CENTRAL



CLEVELAND INDIANS

HOT TOPIC: WHERE WILL THE RUNS COME FROM? The Indians won their third straight Central Division title last year, but they made several changes in the offseason. Gone are DH Edwin Encarnación (32 HRs), 1B Yonder Alonso (23 HRs), C Yan Gomes (16 HRs) and LF Michael Brantley (17 HRs). That will mean that 3B **José Ramírez** (39 HRs, 105 RBIs) and SS Francisco Lindor (38 HRs, 92 RBIs) are going to have even more work to do. Fortunately for the Indians, they don't have to put up too many runs to win. Last year each of their five starting pitchers won at least 11 games with an average of more than one strikeout per inning. In the sad Central, Cleveland should coast to another title. But a lack of offense might mean the team's world championship drought will hit 71 years.

2

MINNESOTA TWINS

HOT TOPIC: WHICH TWINS ARE THE REAL TWINS? After a surprise wild-card appearance in 2017, the Twins struggled in 2018. Minnesota went 78–84 and never put pressure on the Indians, who rolled to another division title. The Twins took a few gambles in the offseason, signing

2B Jonathan Schoop (21 HR for the Orioles and Brewers), 1B C.J. Cron (30 HR for the Rays), and 38-year-old DH Nelson Cruz (37 HR for Seattle).

That trio could give a boost to a lineup that was 12th in the league in home runs—but all three are rather one-dimensional. The rotation has a potential ace in **José Berríos**. The 24-year-old was an All-Star, going 12–11 and finishing 10th in the AL in strikeouts per nine innings (9.5). Minnesota should have a fairly strong hold on second place, but a serious run at a division title is still a few years away.

3

CHICAGO WHITE SOX

HOT TOPIC: HOW MUCH WILL LOSING THE MANNY MACHADO SWEEPSTAKES

HURT? The White Sox went all-in to sign free agent Manny Machado. In addition to reportedly offering him a deal worth as much as \$350 million, Chicago traded for the slugger's brother-in-law, 1B Yonder Alonso, and signed his friend OF Jon Jay. Alas, Machado chose the Padres. That means the White Sox, who lost 100 games for just the fourth time in the franchise's 118-year history, will have to rely on its young core. Hard-throwing RHP **Reynaldo López** finally saw his velocity begin to translate into results: In his last seven starts, he had a 1.38 ERA and 48 strikeouts in 45 ²/₃ innings. That kind of young talent can go a long way in what is a race for second place in a very weak division.

4

DETROIT TIGERS

HOT TOPIC: WHAT HAPPENED TO MICHAEL FULMER? One of the few bright spots in a dismal 2017 season was RHP **Michael Fulmer**.

The righty followed up his 2016 Rookie of the Year season by making his first All-Star team as the Tigers stumbled to 95 losses. Last year Fulmer looked like a shadow of his former self. He was just 3–12 with a 4.69 ERA. Fulmer isn't the only one who struggled. Detroit finished last in homers, next-to-last in runs, and 10th in ERA. The Tigers lost 98 games—but managed to finish third. Still committed to rebuilding with young players, Detroit didn't make any splashy moves in the offseason. A team that is just five years removed from a run of four straight Central titles is looking at a third straight season of flirting with 100 losses.

5

KANSAS CITY ROYALS

HOT TOPIC: CAN THE ROYALS RUN THEIR WAY OUT OF THE BASEMENT? Kansas

City lost 104 games last year, the fifth time in 17 years they hit triple digits. That's a far cry from their heyday of the 1970s and '80s, when the franchise was a consistent American League pennant threat. Those teams were known for stealing lots of bases, and that's a blueprint the Royals look like they're embracing. The team locked down its best player with a contract extension over the winter, as 2B **Whit Merrifield** (45 SB) inked a four-year deal. Kansas City also signed free agents Billy Hamilton (34 SB with the Reds) and Terrance Gore (27 SB in 63 career games). And SS Adalberto Mondesi swiped 32 bags in 75 games. But those old KC teams hit for average and had great pitching—two areas these Royals did little to address.

PITCHING STAFF HEAT INDEX





1

HOUSTON ASTROS

HOT TOPIC: CAN THEY COMPETE WITH THE BIG BOYS? The Astros won 103 games last season then stomped the Indians in the playoffs, sweeping Cleveland in three games. The ALCS was a different story, though, as Houston got outslugged by the Red Sox in a 4–1 series defeat. And the Astros were just 2–5 against the Yankees, giving Houston a 7–12 record against the top two teams in the East. And the Astros are likely going to have to beat at least one of those teams to get back to the World Series. Free agent OF Michael Brantley (.309 BA with Cleveland) will make a strong lineup stronger, assuming the injury-prone slugger can stay on the field. But Houston's power pitchers—led by **Gerrit Cole** (2.88 ERA) and Justin Verlander (2.52 ERA)—will have to keep the league's biggest bats under control.

PITCHING STAFF HEAT INDEX



2

OAKLAND ATHLETICS

HOT TOPIC: WILL MATT CHAPMAN FOLLOW IN JOSH DONALDSON'S SHOES? Oakland has had some great third basemen—including Josh Donaldson, who mounted two strong MVP campaigns in 2013 and '14 before finally winning the award with the Blue Jays in '15. Donaldson (now with the Braves) is a slugger and a tremendous fielder, two traits he shares with **Matt Chapman**. The A's current third baseman finished seventh in MVP voting last year in his first full season in the majors, hitting 24 homers and winning a Gold Glove. He anchored a lineup that propelled Oakland to a wild-card berth. Losing 2B Jed Lowrie (23 HR) to the Mets will hurt, and the A's could use another starting pitcher. But if all goes well, Oakland will again slug its way into the playoff race—and its third baseman will add to his trophy case.



3

LOS ANGELES ANGELS

HOT TOPIC: WHEN WILL WE SEE SHOHEI OHTANI? The biggest story in baseball last year was two-way star **Shohei Ohtani**. Unfortunately, an elbow injury cut short his time on the mound and required him to have offseason surgery. That means the righty, who was 4–2 with a 3.31 ERA, likely won't pitch all year. The good news is that Ohtani (22 HRs in 326 at bats) should be able to take over the designated hitter role in May. He and superstar OF Mike Trout (39 HRs, .312 BA) form one of the league's best duos. Ultimately, though, the Angels will only go as far as their pitching takes them. Los Angeles picked up former All-Stars Matt Harvey (4.94 ERA with two teams) and Trevor Cahill (3.76 ERA with Oakland)—but neither is as potent as Ohtani.



4

SEATTLE MARINERS

HOT TOPIC: WILL THEY KNOW EACH OTHER'S NAMES? We'd go into great detail explaining all the moves the Mariners made in the offseason, but we've only got so much ink and paper. Put it this way: Their 25-man roster will likely include 11 players acquired over the offseason. The ones who will provide the most immediate help should be DH **Edwin Encarnación** (32 HR for the Indians) and OF Jay Bruce, who struggled with injuries last year but hit 36 homers in 2017. The wheeling and dealing saw the team lose its best pitcher, James Paxton. (The lefty threw a no-hitter last May in which he was hitting 99 mph in the ninth inning.) But the moves allowed Seattle to unload some bad contracts and replenish its farm system. The present is dreary, but the future in Seattle looks bright.



5

TEXAS RANGERS

HOT TOPIC: WHEN WILL JOEY GALLO GET HIS FIRST SINGLE? He might not be the best hitter in baseball, but he's certainly one of the most interesting. OF **Joey Gallo** believes in going big or going home. Last year he struck out 207 times and hit 40 home runs—and only 38 singles. In fact, Gallo had just three one-baggers over the last month of the season, compared with 10 extra-base hits. Watching Gallo is about the only exciting thing for Rangers fans to do. Future Hall of Famer Adrián Beltré (15 HR, .273 BA) retired, and the team brought in free agents Shelby Miller (10.69 ERA for the Diamondbacks) and Drew Smyly (who hasn't pitched in the majors since 2016) to try to bolster a pitching staff that had an ERA of 4.92 last year. It's going to be another long season.





THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

THE **DODGERS** SIGN HIM

To prevent Harper from blocking outfield prospect Alex Verdugo, L.A.'s owners successfully lobby for a universal designated hitter. After basically replacing the pitcher's spot in their lineup with Harper, the Dodgers cruise to the World Series. There, they beat the Yankees, who had acquired Charlie Blackmon and Nolan Arenado from the demoralized Rockies. The Bombers and the Dodgers face off in the next seven World Series.

Harper's hand in the Dodgers' dynasty makes him the most popular athlete in L.A. He uses his proximity to Hollywood to pivot into acting, becoming the titular star in a series of films about a detective named Ken Cain.

The series' back-to-basics approach revitalizes the genre, causing studios to shelve their superhero projects and search for the next Cain. Fans of comics are forced to wait 15 years before learning the secret identity of Spider-Lad in *Spider-Man 12: The Quest for Hope*.

While we sat around waiting for Bryce Harper to decide where he was going to play this year (he was still making up his mind when we finished this issue), we imagined a couple of (kinda) possible scenarios.

ILLUSTRATION BY
DANNY HELLMAN

THE **BLUE JAYS** SIGN HIM

Bryce Harper and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. accelerate the Jays' rebuild, as they win the AL East as soon as 2020.

In response, MLB teams become obsessed with acquiring the sons of former players. The Yankees and the Red Sox blow their entire budgets paying their current stars for the draft rights of their future sons. This overreaction paves the way for an uninterrupted Toronto dynasty.

The Jays' success actually forces hockey to compete with baseball for the attention of Canadian fans. The Maple Leafs swing the NHL's "Trade of the Century" to get Connor McDavid from the Oilers. Still, kids all over the country, inspired by Harper, choose to start playing baseball.

One of those kids, Johnnie Wilson, becomes the Deion Sanders of the Great White North—the first NHL-MLB two-sport athlete—and, eventually, the prime minister of Canada during the Great Syrup Crisis of 2067.



WASHINGTON NATIONALS

HOT TOPIC: IS THEIR WINDOW STILL

OPEN? Washington has won the NL East in four of the last seven years, never finishing worse than second. But the Nationals haven't got a single playoff series win to show for it. The core of the team—long anchored by Bryce Harper—was together for several years. The good news is that it got an injection of youth last year in 19-year-old OF Juan Soto. Though he didn't get called up until late May, he hit 22 homers in 116 games. This year 21-year-old Víctor Robles (.288 BA) will play a large role in the outfield. The pitching staff could use a similar youth movement. Led by the incomparable **Max Scherzer**, the team's top four pitchers will all be in their 30s by October.

2

NEW YORK METS

HOT TOPIC: CAN THEIR ACE CATCH A

BREAK? Righthander **Jacob deGrom** had one of the strangest seasons in major league history last year. He won just 10 games (in 32 starts), but he nonetheless nabbed the Cy Young Award. The Mets' bats routinely went to sleep when deGrom, who finished with a 1.70 ERA, pitched. They scored three runs or fewer in 21 of his starts. New York picked up an established hitter in 2B Robinson Canó (.303 BA with Seattle). He came in the same trade that brought closer Edwin Díaz (124 SO in 73 ⅓ innings). Throw in utility infielder Jed Lowrie (23 HR with Oakland), and that's a pretty impressive offseason. Now the trick for the Mets will be to keep their notoriously injury-prone pitching staff healthy. If they can do that, and give their best pitcher some support, the Mets should be back above .500 after two straight losing seasons.



3

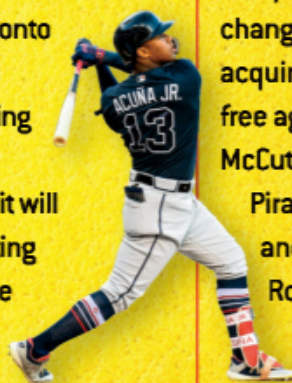
ATLANTA BRAVES

HOT TOPIC: WILL THEY AVOID GROWING

PAINS? Atlanta pulled off baseball's biggest surprise last year, winning the East. The Braves' talented veteran duo of 1B Freddie Freeman (23 HRs) and OF Nick Markakis (93 RBIs) got a huge boost from a pair of kids.

OF **Ronald Acuña** hit 26 homers in 111 games as a 20-year-old, and 21-year-old 2B Ozzie Albies smacked 24.

Atlanta added 3B Josh Donaldson, who struggled with injuries last year but hit 33 home runs with Toronto two seasons ago. If anything holds the Braves back it will be their starting pitching. Mike Foltynewicz (2.85 ERA) is a hard thrower, but there is a drop-off after the righty. Of course, if Acuña and Albies suffer sophomore slumps, it will be a moot point—and a tough year.



4

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

HOT TOPIC: CAN THE NEW TALENT MESH

ENOUGH TO WIN? The NL East is filled with aces, and last year saw the emergence of a new one. Righty **Aaron Nola** (17–6, 2.37 ERA) had a breakout season. He finished third in the Cy Young voting—behind two division rivals, Jacob deGrom and Max Scherzer. Unfortunately, the next best ERA in the starting rotation belonged to Jake Arrieta (3.96), and the offense was almost totally devoid of star power. That should change. Philadelphia acquired a pair of talented free agents: OF Andrew McCutchen (20 HR for the Pirates and Yankees), and reliever David Robertson (3.23 ERA for the Yankees). And the Phillies traded for a rising star behind the plate, J.T. Realmuto (21 HR for Miami). That's enough raw talent to put Philadelphia in the postseason mix.



5

MIAMI MARLINS

HOT TOPIC: ARE THEY EVEN

TRYING? After the 2017 season, the Marlins traded away baseball's best slugger, Giancarlo Stanton, All-Star OF Marcell Ozuna, and OF Christian Yelich, who won the NL MVP Award last year for the Brewers. This offseason, the latest Marlin sent packing following a great year was J.T. Realmuto, one of the top hitting catchers in the game. What does Miami have to show for it? The team has just one minor leaguer ranked on MLB.com's top 100 prospects list. Instead of investing in its young core, the Marlins will pay \$20 million to LHP **Wei-Yin Chen**, who was 6–12 with a 4.79 ERA last year. It's going to be another long season for Marlins fans. But at least they won't have to bid another young talent goodbye. They're all already gone.



PITCHING STAFF HEAT INDEX





ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

HOT TOPIC: HOW LONG WILL THEY ENJOY THEIR NEWEST STAR?

The Cardinals pulled off a huge coup in the offseason, landing perennial All-Star 1B **Paul Goldschmidt** from the Diamondbacks without giving up any players they would have relied on heavily this season. The catch is that Goldy (33 HR) is a free agent after this season, so his time in St. Louis might be short—and the Cardinals are feeling a sense of urgency. So in addition to trading for Goldschmidt, they signed Andrew Miller (4.24 ERA for the Indians). He struggled with injuries last year but was stellar during Cleveland's postseason run in 2016. The Cards are hoping that he'll have a chance to show he's still got what it takes to dominate in the playoffs.

2

MILWAUKEE BREWERS

HOT TOPIC: WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BULLPEN?

Few players went through a more bizarre season than reliever **Corey Knebel**. Originally the team's closer, he lost that role after struggling through the first half of the season. Then he was demoted to the minors for a brief stint in August. When he returned, he was unhittable. The flamethrower faced 57 hitters and struck out 33 of them over the final month of the season. He gave up just five hits in that span. His return to form gives manager Craig Counsell a problem any skipper would love to have: too many options. In addition to Knebel, Counsell has All-Star Josh Hader (143 SO in 81⅓ innings) and Jeremy Jeffress (8–1 1.29 ERA). With that kind of pen and an offense led by MVP Christian Yelich, Milwaukee's starting pitching shortcomings don't look so problematic.



3

CHICAGO CUBS

HOT TOPIC: WHAT ARE THEY WAITING FOR?

For a team that went from World Champions in 2016 to wild card loser in 2018, the Cubs had a strangely quiet offseason. They stayed out of the Manny Machado and Bryce Harper sweepstakes, and their biggest acquisition was 2B Daniel Descalso (.238 BA for Arizona). Sure, there is still loads of offensive talent on the roster, but the pitching staff is another story. The team's two best starters, Jon Lester (18–6) and **Kyle Hendricks** (3.44 ERA) each put up good numbers, but neither one looked especially good. Both had trouble with their velocity, which translated to low strikeout rates—which is problematic in today's game. Chicago was fourth in the league in runs scored; that's a good sign, because if the Cubs are going to return to the playoffs, they're going to have to slug their way in.



4

CINCINNATI REDS

HOT TOPIC: IS THEIR OFFSEASON HAUL PAST ITS PRIME?

Cincinnati made a couple of very big moves in the offseason, snagging outfielders **Yasiel Puig** (23 HRs) and **Matt Kemp** (21 HRs) from the Dodgers and RHP **Sonny Gray** from the Yankees. That's three guys with All-Star appearances on their résumés. The question is: How good are those three going to be in the future? Kemp was an All-Star last year, but at age 33. Puig has been erratic, but he seemed to settle down last season. Gray was an All-Star in 2015 but he's had a 4.59 ERA since. All three were, to some extent, cast off by their old teams. Kemp and Puig were let go to make room for younger players, while Gray simply wasn't working out in the Bronx. In the best case, they will show what made them stars in the first place. If not, the Reds are looking at missing the playoffs for the sixth straight season.



5

PITTSBURGH PIRATES

HOT TOPIC: DID THEY MISS THEIR CHANCE?

After making a big move during the 2018 season, Pittsburgh was quiet in the offseason. The Pirates got RHP **Chris Archer** from the Rays in July for two highly touted prospects. Archer was O.K. with Pittsburgh, going 3–3 with a 4.30 ERA. But the Pirates were just six games out of first when they made the move—but they never got closer than that. And the move used up their best trade chips. So Pittsburgh will hope that Archer can elevate the staff, which has a couple of good arms. Righty **Jameson Taillon** missed a chunk of 2017 while fighting cancer. Now healthy, he finished fifth among NL pitchers in WAR last year. Trevor Williams (14–10) was solid as well, but Pittsburgh didn't do enough to upgrade a lineup that was 13th in the league in homers.



PITCHING STAFF HEAT INDEX





1 LOS ANGELES DODGERS

HOT TOPIC: WILL WE SEE A PASSING OF THE TORCH? Lefthander **Clayton Kershaw** has been baffling hitters for more than a decade. It says something about how good he is that his 2018 stats (9–5, 2.73 ERA) could be considered troublesome. But it was clear that the 31-year-old wasn't his old, dominant self. And further alarms were raised in spring training, when Kershaw was shut down in the first week with shoulder inflammation. While it's too early to write off Kershaw, it's not outrageous to suggest that righty Walker Buehler (8–5, 2.62 ERA) could anchor the staff. Either way, Los Angeles will again be loaded—but a third straight World Series trip might come down to Kershaw's health.

2

COLORADO ROCKIES

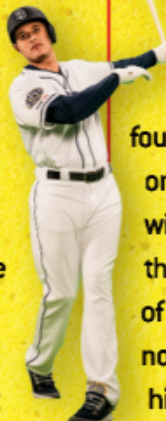
HOT TOPIC: WILL THE BULLPEN GET ANYONE OUT? Before the 2018 campaign, the Rockies committed \$106 million to three relievers through the 2020 season. The trio of **Wade Davis**, Jake McGee, and Bryan Shaw went on to have horrible seasons. They combined for a 5.41 ERA and allowed 27 home runs. Colorado's best reliever was Adam Ottavino (2.43 ERA), and he left for the Yankees as a free agent. So at least one of the three relievers who struggled last year is going to have to step up. The most likely candidate is Davis, who saved 43 games despite a 4.13 ERA. As usual, Colorado's lineup is filled with sluggers, including 3B Nolan Arenado (38 HR), SS Trevor Story (37 HR), and OF Charlie Blackmon (29 HR). They'll give the Rockies plenty of leads. Whether that will translate to wins is an entirely different issue.



3

SAN DIEGO PADRES

HOT TOPIC: IS IT TOO EARLY TO START THINKING WORLD SERIES? The Padres were already an exciting team before they went out and signed one of the best free agents on the market. **Manny Machado** is great, but no baseball player is good enough to give his team instant credibility. [Just ask Mike Trout.] But while Machado (37 HR for two teams last year) is the most developed talent the Padres have, he's not the *only* talent. San Diego has 10 of the top 100 prospects in the game, led by Fernando Tatis Jr. [according to MLB.com's list]. Machado's deal is for 10 years (and \$300 million). He can afford to be a little patient. The Padres might not be ready to challenge the big boys in the NL this season. But when Tatis and the rest of the kids age a bit, they'll be scary for years to come.



4

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS

HOT TOPIC: WHO WILL BE THE NEW FACE OF THE FRANCHISE? For more than half a decade, 1B Paul Goldschmidt was the Diamondbacks. He was a six-time All-Star who finished in the top six in MVP voting four times. And he's still only 31. But Goldschmidt will be a free agent after the season, and instead of risking losing him for nothing, the team traded him to the Cardinals for a couple of decent youngsters who aren't going to push Arizona into the playoffs this . It was a wise move, but that doesn't mean it will go over well in Phoenix. The team also lost its most promising pitcher, Patrick Corbin (246 SO in 200 innings) to the Nationals and its best outfielder, A.J. Pollock to the Dodgers. Except for RHP Zack Greinke (15–11) and OF **David Peralta** (30 HR), the team is short on talent—and identity.



5

SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS

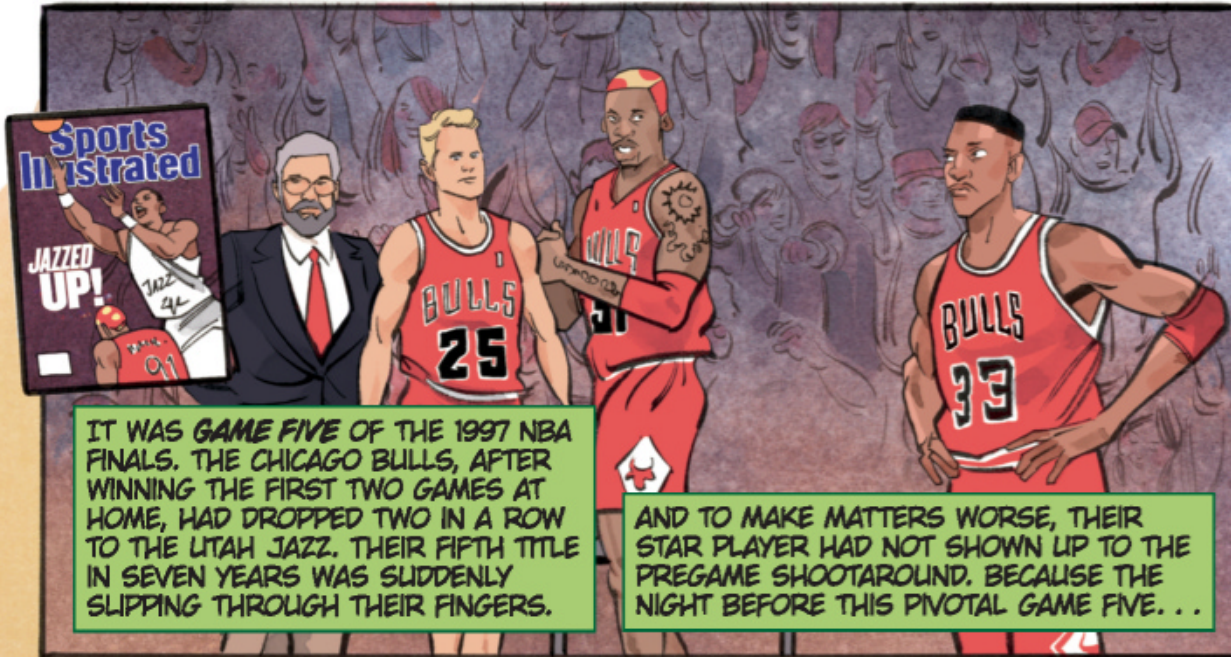
HOT TOPIC: CAN THEY GIVE THEIR SKIPPER A NICE GOING-AWAY GIFT? At the start of spring training, manager Bruce Bochy announced that this would be his last season. What he's accomplished has been remarkable. He's one of four managers whose career started in the expansion era (1961) with three World Series titles. He's 11th all time in wins. But the chances he'll go out on a high are slim. The Giants are mired in a rebuilding project. At least they have embraced it. Last year they threw big money at questionable free agents and paid the price. Now, they appear ready to give their young players a chance to develop while keeping a couple of veterans, such as LHP **Madison Bumgarner** (3.26 ERA), C Buster Posey (.284 BA), and 1B Brandon Belt (14 HR) around. It's a smart strategy—but not one that will send Bochy off in the style he deserves.



PITCHING STAFF HEAT INDEX

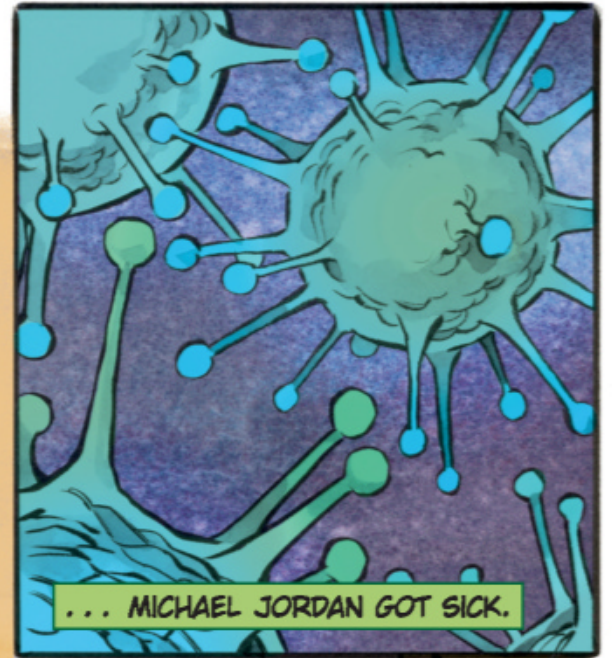


This NBA playoff season, *Sports Illustrated Kids* invites you back in time to visit one of the most iconic performances in Finals history. . . .

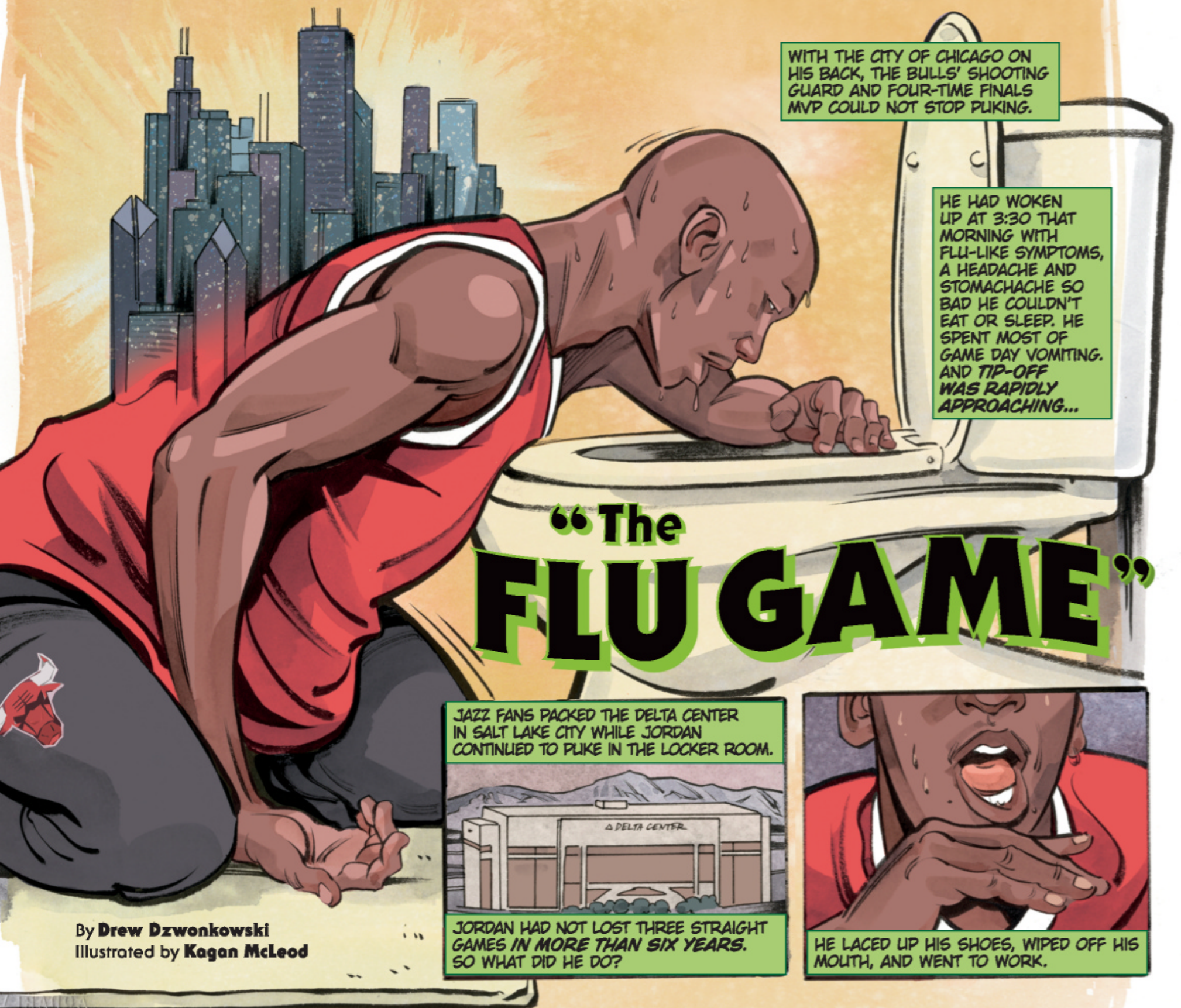


IT WAS GAME FIVE OF THE 1997 NBA FINALS. THE CHICAGO BULLS, AFTER WINNING THE FIRST TWO GAMES AT HOME, HAD DROPPED TWO IN A ROW TO THE UTAH JAZZ. THEIR FIFTH TITLE IN SEVEN YEARS WAS SUDDENLY SLIPPING THROUGH THEIR FINGERS.

AND TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, THEIR STAR PLAYER HAD NOT SHOWN UP TO THE PREGAME SHOOTAROUND. BECAUSE THE NIGHT BEFORE THIS PIVOTAL GAME FIVE. . .



. . . MICHAEL JORDAN GOT SICK.



WITH THE CITY OF CHICAGO ON HIS BACK, THE BULLS' SHOOTING GUARD AND FOUR-TIME FINALS MVP COULD NOT STOP PUKEING.

HE HAD WOKEN UP AT 3:30 THAT MORNING WITH FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS, A HEADACHE AND STOMACHACHE SO BAD HE COULDN'T EAT OR SLEEP. HE SPENT MOST OF GAME DAY VOMITING. AND TIP-OFF WAS RAPIDLY APPROACHING...

"The FLU GAME"

JAZZ FANS PACKED THE DELTA CENTER IN SALT LAKE CITY WHILE JORDAN CONTINUED TO PUKE IN THE LOCKER ROOM.



JORDAN HAD NOT LOST THREE STRAIGHT GAMES IN MORE THAN SIX YEARS. SO WHAT DID HE DO?



HE LACED UP HIS SHOES, WIPED OFF HIS MOUTH, AND WENT TO WORK.

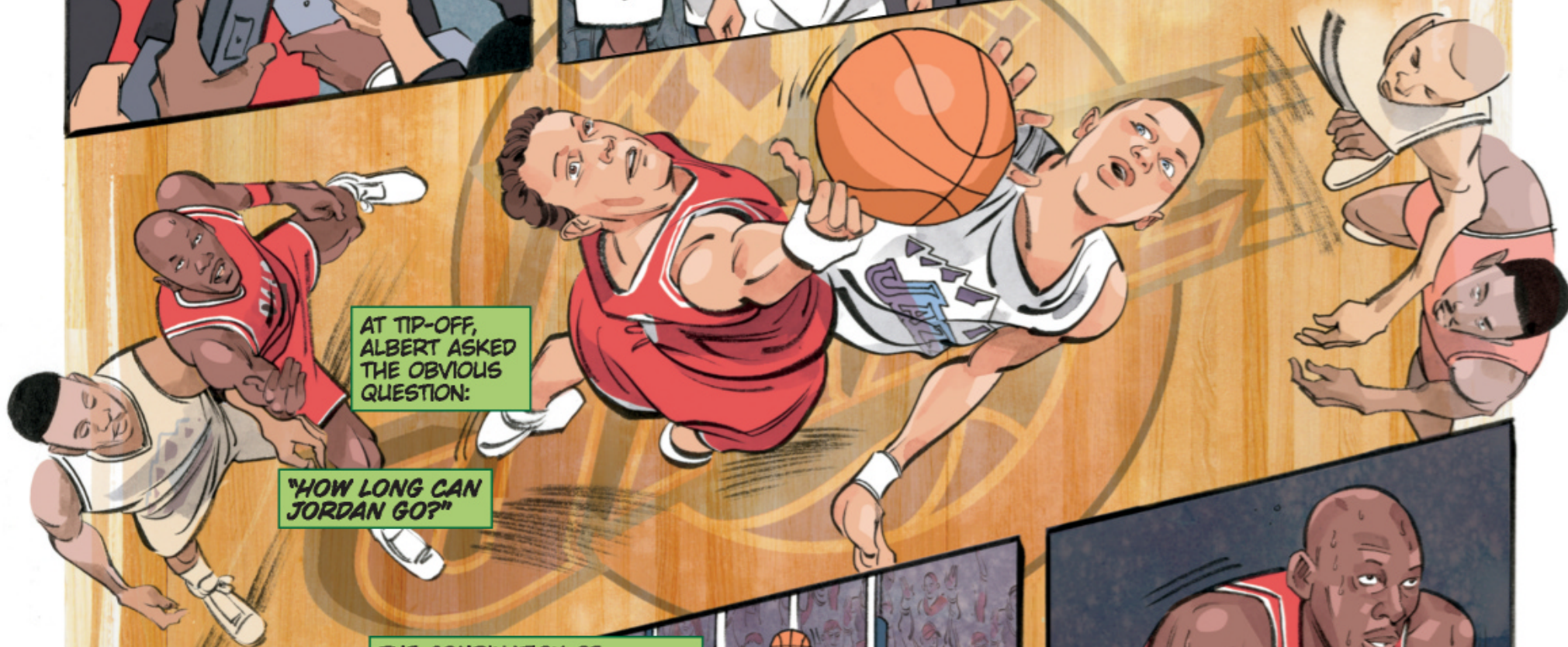
By **Drew Dzwonkowski**
Illustrated by **Kagan McLeod**



IT WAS THE ALL-STAR COMBO OF JOHN STOCKTON AND KARL MALONE AGAINST THE BULLS, AND JORDAN AGAINST HIMSELF.



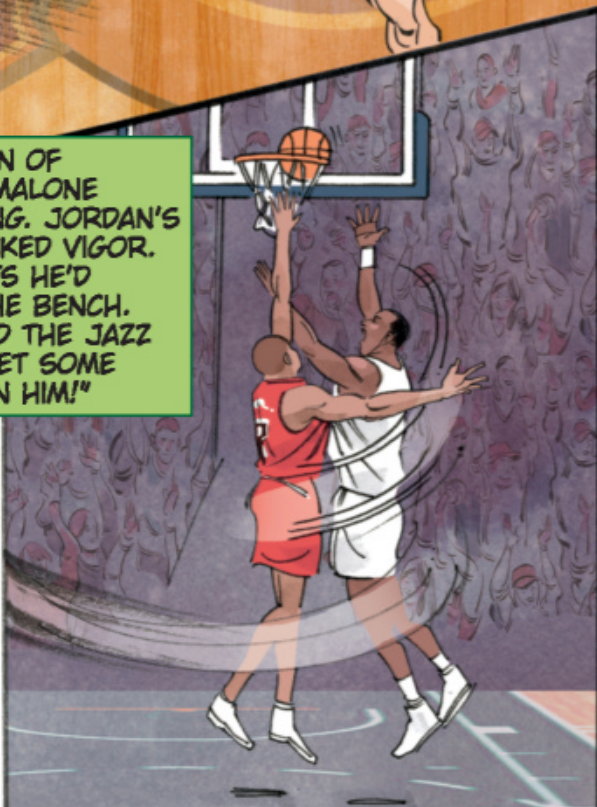
BEFORE A PRIMETIME AUDIENCE, COMMENTATORS MARV ALBERT AND BILL WALTON (WITH AHMAD RASHAD ON THE SIDELINE) BROUGHT THE BATTLE TO LIFE.



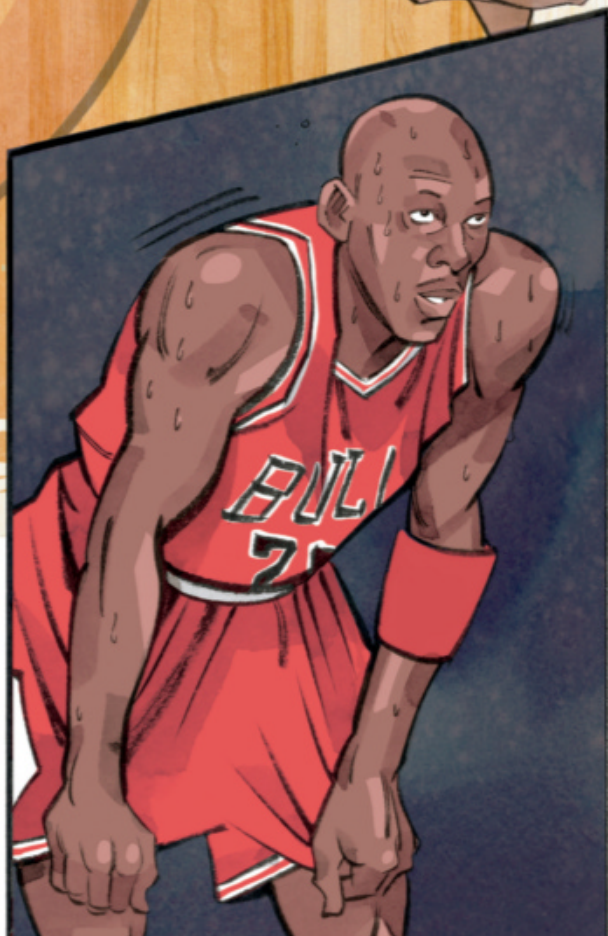
AT TIP-OFF, ALBERT ASKED THE OBVIOUS QUESTION:

"HOW LONG CAN JORDAN GO?"

THE COMBINATION OF STOCKTON AND MALONE PROVED DAUNTING. JORDAN'S MOVEMENTS LACKED VIGOR. DURING TIMEOUTS HE'D COLLAPSE ON THE BENCH. WALTON OFFERED THE JAZZ FREE ADVICE: "SET SOME HARD PICKS ON HIM!"

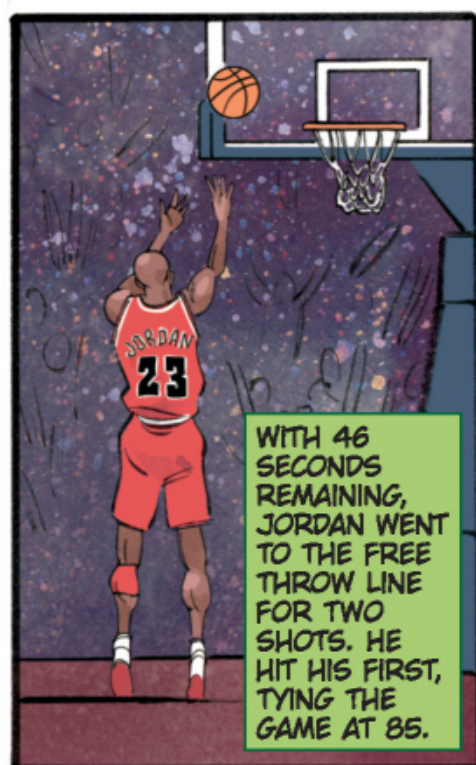
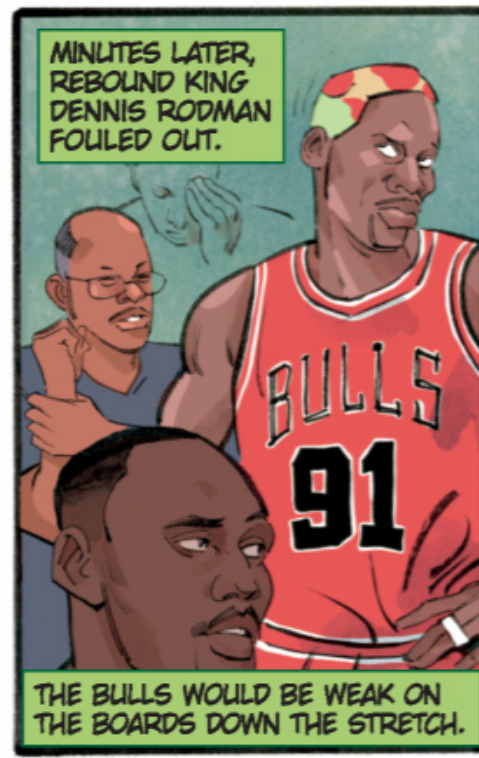
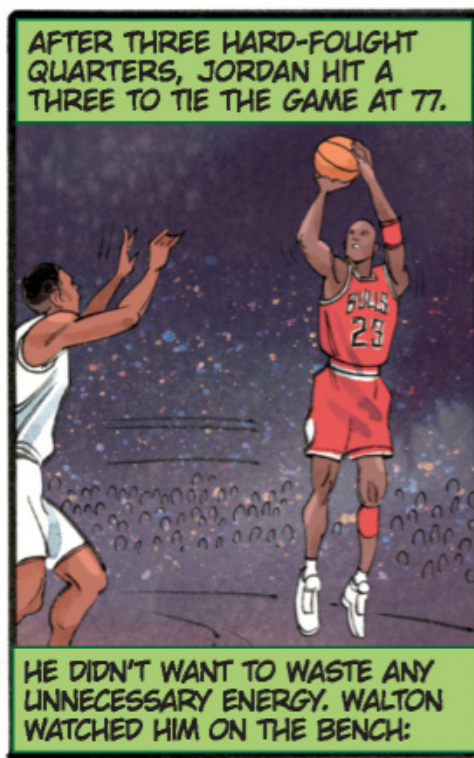
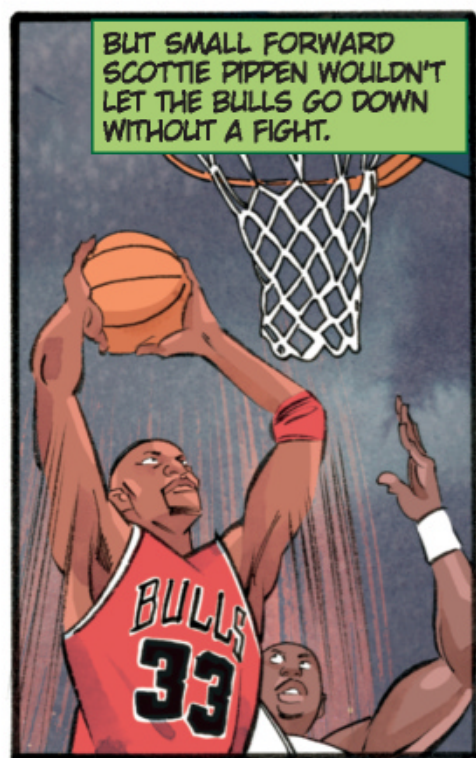


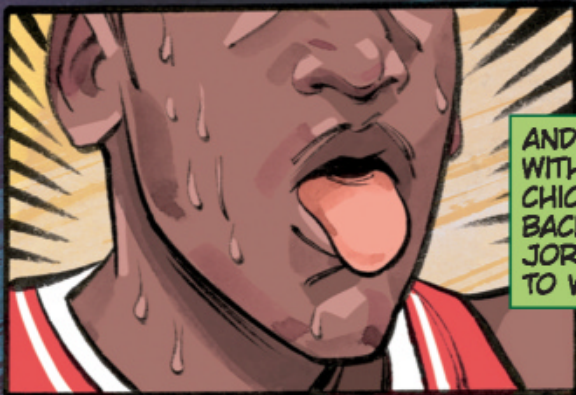
BUT RASHAD NOTED, "IN GAMES WHERE HE'S EITHER BEEN HURT OR SICK, IT'S BEEN **BAD NEWS** FOR THE OPPONENT."



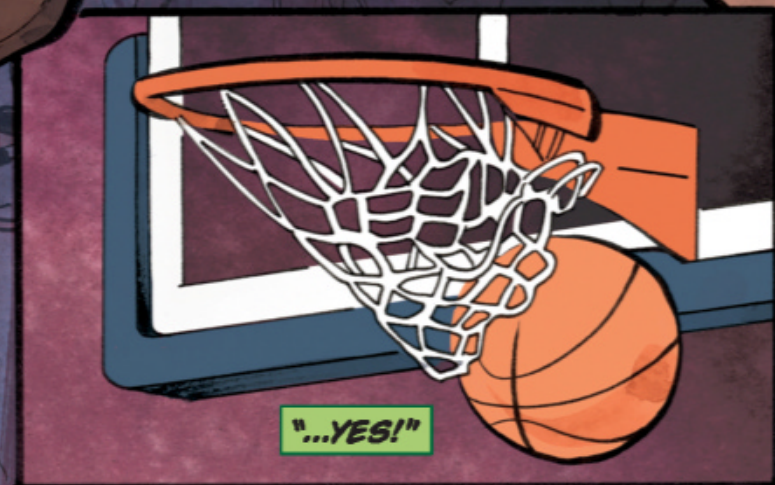
NEVERTHELESS, THE JAZZ HELD JORDAN TO FOUR POINTS AND ENDED THE FIRST QUARTER WITH A THIRTEEN-POINT LEAD. THE DELTA CENTER WAS ROARING IN TRIUMPH.

An SIK True Story





AND ONCE AGAIN, WITH THE CITY OF CHICAGO ON HIS BACK, MICHAEL JORDAN WENT TO WORK.

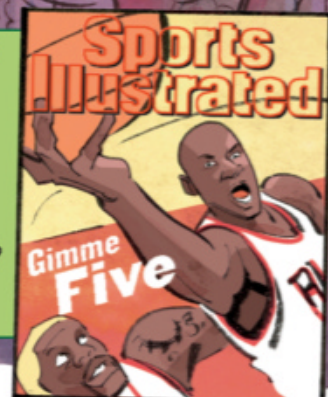


"...YES!"

EXHAUSTED, JORDAN COLLAPSED INTO PIPPEN'S ARMS AS THE JAZZ CALLED THEIR FINAL TIMEOUT. HE ENDED THE GAME WITH 38 POINTS.



YEARS LATER, ALBERT NAMED JORDAN'S FLU GAME "ONE OF THE ALL-TIME GREATEST PERFORMANCES" HE'D EVER SEEN. CHICAGO HELD ON TO WIN THE GAME. AND THE CLINCHER TWO DAYS LATER. (AND ANOTHER CHAMPIONSHIP THE FOLLOWING YEAR.) THE END.



NUTS AND BOLTS

The 51-year-old Cooper, currently the longest-tenured coach in the NHL, has led Tampa Bay to the conference finals in three of the last four seasons.



THE LIGHTNING DIARY

They play board games, compete for swag, take turns razzing the Ivy Leaguer—
with Lightning coach **JON COOPER AND HIS STAFF**

BY
ALEX PREWITT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
DAVID E. KLUTHO



IT IS HALF past midnight when Jon Cooper emerges from his office at Amalie Arena, necktie loosened under a dark-blue suit. He spies a nearby clock. Idling in the doorway, Cooper, Tampa's 51-year-old coach, surveys the standard postgame coaching flotsam: crumpled stat sheets, closed laptops, darkened TV screens, a sushi party platter whittled down to some tuna sashimi and a golf-ball-sized glob of wasabi. By now, though—nearly three hours after the Lightning finished a 6–3 win over visiting San Jose on Jan. 19, maintaining their huge lead over the rest of the Eastern Conference entering the NHL All-Star break—the rest of his staff have gone home.

“I know we’re blessed, making a lot of money and all,” Cooper says, out of nowhere. “But if you broke it down by hour. . . .”

He grabs a seat in the bullpen, the nickname for the windowless workspace that Tampa Bay’s coaching staff shares for studying film, discussing tactics and mercilessly roasting one another. For the past three days **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED** has hunkered down here with Cooper and his assistants, attending prescout meetings and strategy sessions, seeing how the league’s best team—and, at six seasons, its longest-tenured head coach—endeavors to bring order to a chaotic game.

More than their peers in other sports, NHL coaches are rendered largely helpless when the action starts. Sure, they bark line changes and scribble face-off plays on whiteboards, but they aren’t MLB managers ordering defensive shifts or NFL offensive coordinators radioing calls from the booth, able to watch their calculations pay off with real-time results. So what is a coach, that singular breed of master micromanager, supposed to do?

“I don’t think people appreciate all the work that goes into this job,” he says. “Because it’s a lot more than drawing the X’s and O’s of a neutral zone forecheck.”



- and devote themselves totally to giving the NHL’s best team its edge. SI went behind the scenes
F and found that the roots of their success go far deeper than plotting the perfect penalty kill



⚡ ⚡ DAY ONE JAN. 17

Outside the bullpen door, a small sign glows in blue neon letters: MEETING IN PROGRESS.

“O.K., boys,” Cooper says, setting down his coffee at 9:21 a.m. “Let’s get organized.”

Bent over their laptops, the boys—assistants Todd Richards, Jeff Halpern and Derek Lalonde, video coach Nigel Kirwan, video coordinator Brian Garlock, and goalie coach Frantz Jean—are preparing for tonight’s matchup with Atlantic Division-rival Toronto. Over the next nine hours they will plod through the usual game-day routine: morning skate, film-study sessions, team meetings (two), a meeting with each power-play unit, a meeting with the penalty kill . . . not to mention several discussions about scheduling more meetings.

Don’t get the wrong idea, though. This isn’t one of those 24/7 operations, all-nighters pulled on air mattresses beneath a projection screen’s glow. They play tennis on road trips, race laps in hotel pools, and recently held a board game night at which Richards taught everyone the rules to Settlers of Catan. “We also have a chess ladder,” Lalonde notes from his desk. “The Princeton guy is *not* at the top.”

The Ivy Leaguer getting razed would be Halpern, a class of 1999 economics major who played for seven NHL teams over the next 15-plus years. Like Lalonde, though, Halpern is a rookie behind the bench at this level, which makes them easy targets. When Lalonde reported to work in thigh-hugging bike shorts, Cooper greeted him, “Do you own any mirrors in your house?”

No doubt the casual atmosphere reflects the Lightning’s perch atop the league’s standings, where they have been since Nov. 29. “Chemistry and synergy are paramount,” Cooper explains. “If you’re trying to build a culture with the players, you’d be a little hypocritical if you didn’t have the same thing in the staff.”

The players have noticed. “The ability to create as little

confusion as possible has been the best thing about this coaching staff since I got here,” says defenseman Ryan McDonagh, who was acquired from the Rangers last season. “But I also think they do a good job of giving the message to us every day in a different way, in different voices, so it doesn’t feel stale. That’s the sign of a coaching staff that trusts one another.”

After the morning skate Cooper and the assistants return to the bullpen to dissect film of the Maple Leafs’ ninth-ranked power play. The Lightning won their last meeting, 4–1 on Dec. 13, but goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy was pelted with 16 scoring chances on six man-advantages. Tonight the Lightning will counter by unveiling a 3–1 neutral zone forecheck—stacking three skaters across the defensive blue line on the penalty kill instead of their usual 2–2 setup. Meanwhile, a pair of new golf shoes has shown up in Cooper’s office. (Coaches get tons of swag.) They are slightly too big but the perfect size for Lalonde, who runs the league’s sixth-best penalty kill with Richards.

“If their PP goes 0-fer tonight,” Cooper says, “you can have them.”

He turns around, heads into his office and adds with a wink, “Gotta keep them on their toes.”

⚡ ⚡ DAY TWO Jan. 18

Thanks to the new-look penalty kill, Lalonde keeps the spikes. But a second-period defensive breakdown leads to winger Mitch Marner’s decisive goal in a 4–2 Leafs win.

RESULTS ORIENTED

Working off a scouting report from Jean (above), the Lightning lit up Sharks goalie Martin Jones six times on Jan. 19.



Between bites of eggs and fruit, Halpern watches last night's game from "coach cam," a high-and-wide angle shot that only the staff can access. "I watched my shifts as a player," he says. "But not like this, poring over it."

Now that he is on the other side, Halpern worries about delivery as much as message. It's why he keeps a note card with a Bill Walsh quote in a desk drawer: "Your enthusiasm becomes

their enthusiasm; your lukewarm presentation becomes their lukewarm presentation." And why he recently read *Practice Perfect*, a book about optimizing the act of improving. His biggest takeaway: "Creativity through automaticity," Halpern says. "If you do a drill every day, it's like playing the piano. Eventually you get so good that you can start riffing with the notes."

At 11:10 a.m., Halpern unplugs his laptop and heads into the locker room to meet with winger Adam Erne. The rugged 23-year-old is halfway through his first full NHL season. Sitting at Erne's stall, Halpern spends several minutes on defensive zone coverage. "If this puck comes out of the corner and hits you," Halpern asks, "what's your next play?"

"It's a confidence builder for the players to know where they stand, rather than just guessing," Erne says after practice. "Especially for young guys like me who don't necessarily have as many interactions with coaches, the more communication, the better."

Cooper follows that same approach with Tampa's captain. Over these three days he will seek out Steven Stamkos for private chats three times. Stamkos received the C in March 2014, a year after Cooper stepped behind the bench. "We're growing up together, and I think you're seeing the fruits of our labors," Cooper says. "I don't want to be surrounded by a bunch of yes-men. Stammer [Stamkos] has been good for me in that respect of pushing back. I always thought one of my biggest strengths was managing people. But I'm way better now than when I came into the league."



DAY THREE Jan. 19

Only two members of Cooper's staff predate his promotion to Tampa. The first is Kirwan, an original Lightning employee who started in marketing and pivoted to video coach in 1996.

The second old-timer arrives this morning at 7:29 a.m. and begins punching data from the Toronto game into an Excel file titled STATISTIQUES GARDIENS SAISON 2018-19. Born to a French-Canadian mother and Haitian father, Jean has been nurturing netminders since age 14, when the owner of a Montreal-area goalie school tapped him to help out during a summer camp. Jean is critical to the larger operation. On game days he posts a scouting report that breaks down the opposing goalie's tendencies. Tonight, for instance, after Jean notes that San Jose's Martin Jones is especially vulnerable to high-blocker and high-glove shots, the Lightning will score four times in those two areas during a 6-3 win.

Jean's analytical approach benefits Tampa's goalies too, of course. When Vasilevskiy arrived as a first-rounder in 2012, Jean noticed that the Russian struggled with screened and tipped shots, hovering around a .600 save percentage in those situations. Today Vasilevskiy, who finished third last season in Vezina Trophy voting, has steadied near .900. "Hockey is all about the same patterns," Jean says. "And we have an answer to every pattern."

Or so they try. A few hours later, as techno music from the locker room softly thumps through his office walls, Cooper fills the dead time by revisiting old wounds. Cued on a laptop is footage from last year's Game 7 loss the Capitals in the conference finals. Missed opportunities abound.

Earlier in his career, like many young coaches, he was obsessed with trying to control the chaos. "Every single detail, over and over," Cooper says. "Can't get caught up in the minutiae. I treated every game like it's Game 7. Every game is not Game 7. There are a lot of Game 1s in there."

Minutiae matters most in the playoffs, of course. Before each series Lightning players receive a 10-or-so-page booklet crammed with scouting reports and diagrams detailing the opponent's structure. But the footage unspooling on Cooper's laptop highlights an essential truth: No matter how many hours are poured into scheming new penalty-kill alignments or breaking down goalies, things simply happen.

"Hockey's just different," Cooper will say later tonight. "You can't structurally draw up a play for a puck that is chipped off the glass. The game happens so fast that you need a structure in place, and players have to buy into the system. Because if guys go rogue, there are so many moving parts that the whole thing breaks down."

"And that's why you need a really good staff." □

END ZONE

WHAT'S THE CALL?

Illustrations by Sean Tiffany

1 GOING DEEP

In a soccer game between the Santa Fe Attack and the Alameda Bulls, Attack midfielder Joanie Lopez is handling a throw-in for her team around midfield. She notices that her teammate, Tricia Bell, has snuck behind the Bulls' defense. Lopez throws a long pass that reaches Bell, who is standing alone in front of the goal area. Bell receives the pass and scores easily against an overwhelmed goaltender. The Bulls appeal for an offside call. You're the referee. Does the goal count?



2 TWO-STEP

The Mount Juliet Jazz are playing the Smithville Spurs in a basketball game under NBA rules. Jazz guard Danny Wilson receives a pass on the wing as Spurs defender Miles Stewart guards him. Wilson pivots backward, moving his right foot, to guard the ball against Stewart's prying hands. He then raises his left foot (his pivot foot) off the ground before releasing the ball to dribble. His left foot and the ball, however, hit the floor at the exact same time. Stewart appeals for a traveling call, but Wilson says his pivot foot didn't land until he was already dribbling. You're the referee. What's the call?

3 HACKEY SACK

Drew Champion is playing Arthur Fisherman in cornhole under the rules of the American Cornhole Association. While making one of his tosses, Fisherman puts an extreme amount of spin on the bag, causing it to bounce off the ground, before sliding up the board and landing in the hole. Can he do that?



ANSWERS ON PAGE 55

GAMES

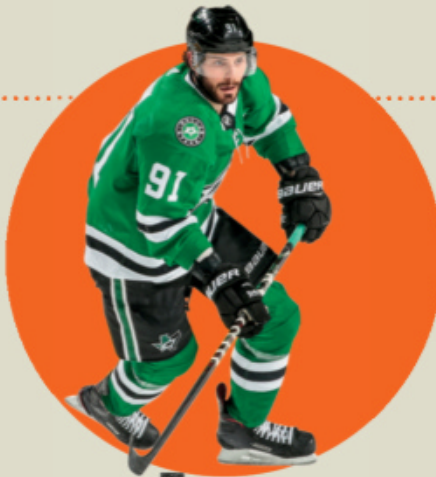
BIRTHDAY SUITS

The birth-year jerseys are coming to an end (see: Sidney Crosby, number 87 and born in '87). The oldest players in this year's draft were born in '99, which is retired league-wide for Wayne Gretzky. Do you know which of these players are wearing their birthdays?



1. San Jose Sharks defenseman Brent Burns (88) was born in 1988:

True ☐ False ☐



2. Dallas Stars forward Tyler Seguin (91) was born in 1991:

True ☐ False ☐



3. Nashville Predators forward Ryan Johansen (92) was born in 1992:

True ☐ False ☐



4. Montreal Canadiens forward Jonathan Drouin (92) was born in 1992:

True ☐ False ☐



5. Philadelphia Flyers forward Jakub Voracek (93) was born in 1993:

True ☐ False ☐



6. Edmonton Oilers forward Connor McDavid (97) was born in 1997:

True ☐ False ☐



MYSTERY ATHLETE

CLUE #1 The Mystery Athlete was drafted by the Washington Capitals in the first round of the NHL draft after winning a gold medal at the world juniors championships.

CLUE #2 After scoring 26 goals for the Predators during the 2014-15 season, the Mystery Athlete was voted to the All-Rookie team.

CLUE #3 He shares a last name with a Hall of Famer who won two Stanley Cups with the Colorado Avalanche, but they are not related.

THE MYSTERY ATHLETE IS:

TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Last season, the Boston Red Sox' Mookie Betts (*right*) won the AL MVP Award and a Gold Glove. Who was the last player before him to win both?



- A. Joe Mauer, 2009
- B. Mike Trout, 2016
- C. Jimmy Rollins, 2007

ART GALLERY

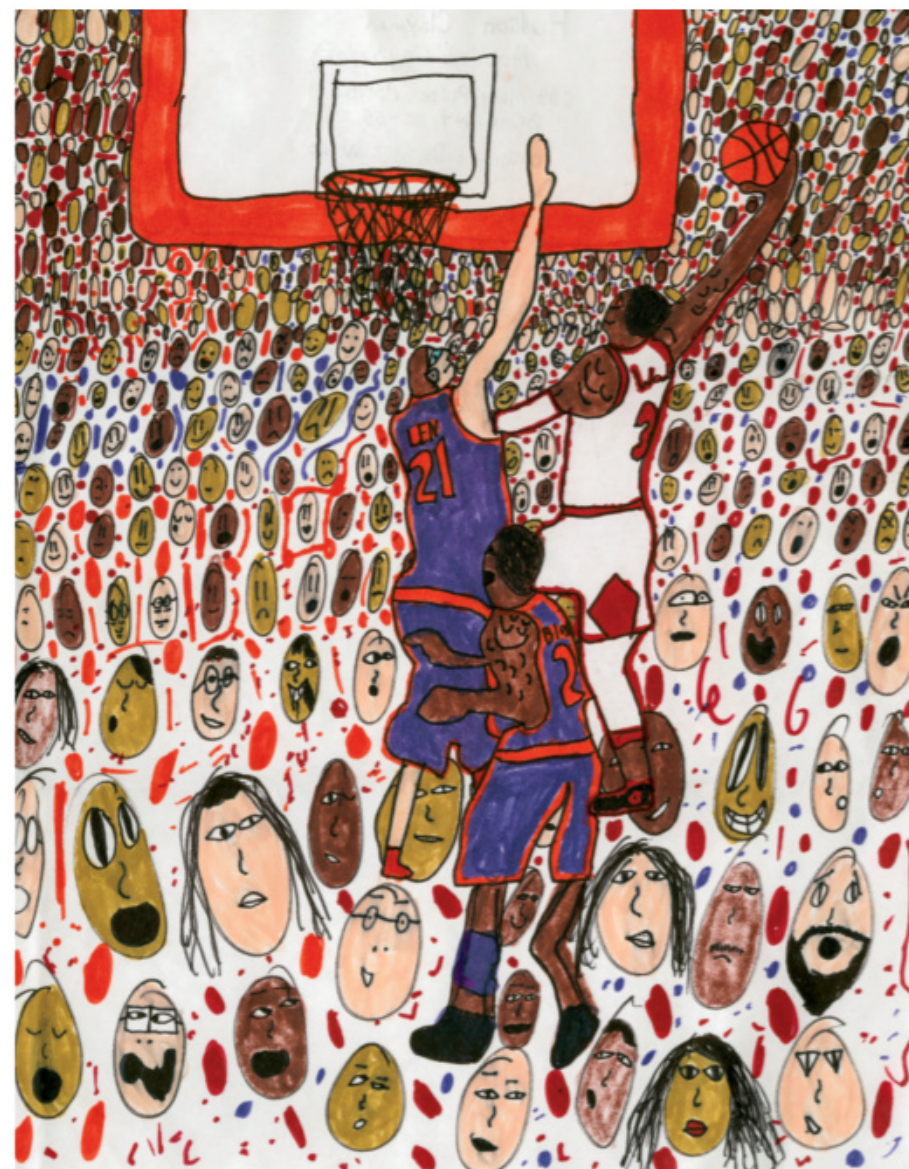


← **J.D. Martinez**
Adi, 12,
Texas



Victor Espinoza and American Pharoah
Lexi, 12,
Ohio

Aaron Rodgers
Jack, 11,
New Hampshire



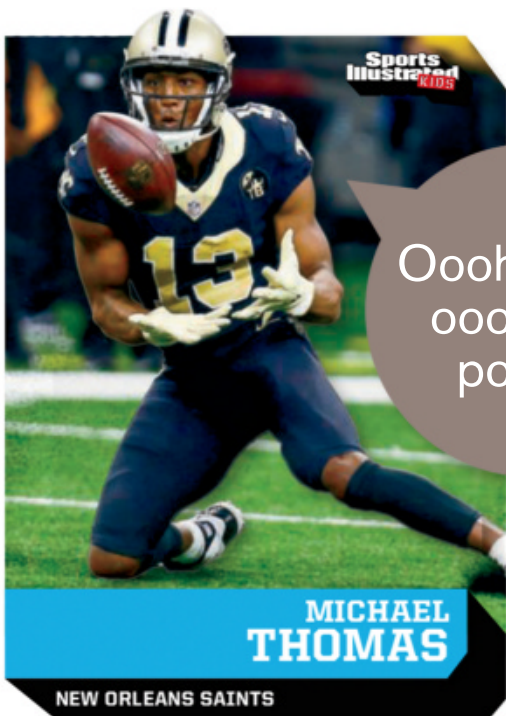
Dwyane Wade
Hudson, 13,
New York

Send your drawings to:
ART GALLERY, SI Kids,
225 Liberty Street,
7th Floor, New York, NY 10281.
Please include your name,
address, date of birth, and
the name of the athlete.





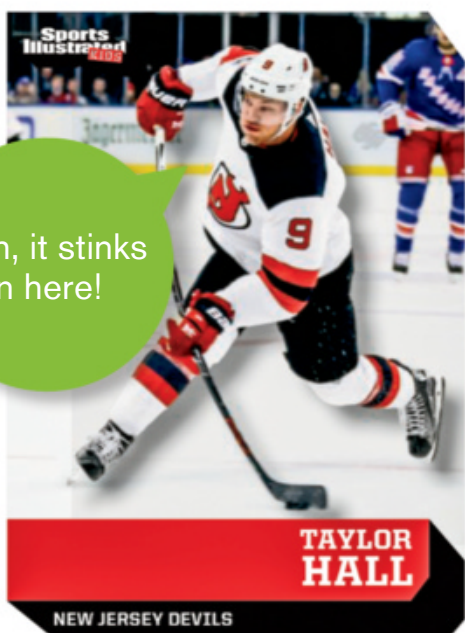
Send your cards to: **COMIC CARDS**, SI Kids,
225 Liberty Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10281.
Please include your name, address, and date of birth.



Oooh, oooh,
oooh, hot
potato!

COMIC CARDS

Chase, 10, Massachusetts



Ooh, it stinks
in here!

Donovan, 11, Virginia



Hey guys, the
sky is falling!

A.J., 13, Pennsylvania

Don't make
me come
up there!



Nash, 9, Ohio



Wait, where's
the net?!

Justin, 11, Ontario

ANSWERS

● What's the Call? (page 52)

1. The goal counts. A player cannot be offside on throw-ins, or on any other kind of restart, such as a goal kick or a corner kick.
2. Wilson is called for traveling. Under NBA rules, the ball must be out of his hand before he raises his pivot foot. It doesn't matter if they hit the floor at the same time.
3. He can't do that. The bag cannot bounce before reaching the board.

● Birthday Suits (page 53)

1. False; 2. False; 3. True; 4. False; 5. False; 6. True

● Trivia (page 53)

A. Joe Mauer

● Mystery Athlete (page 53)

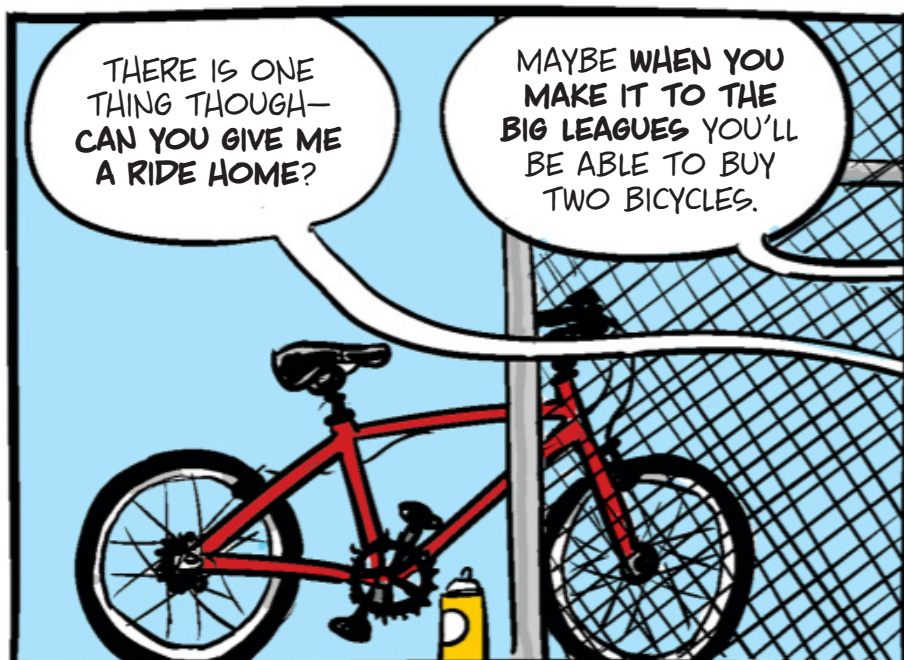
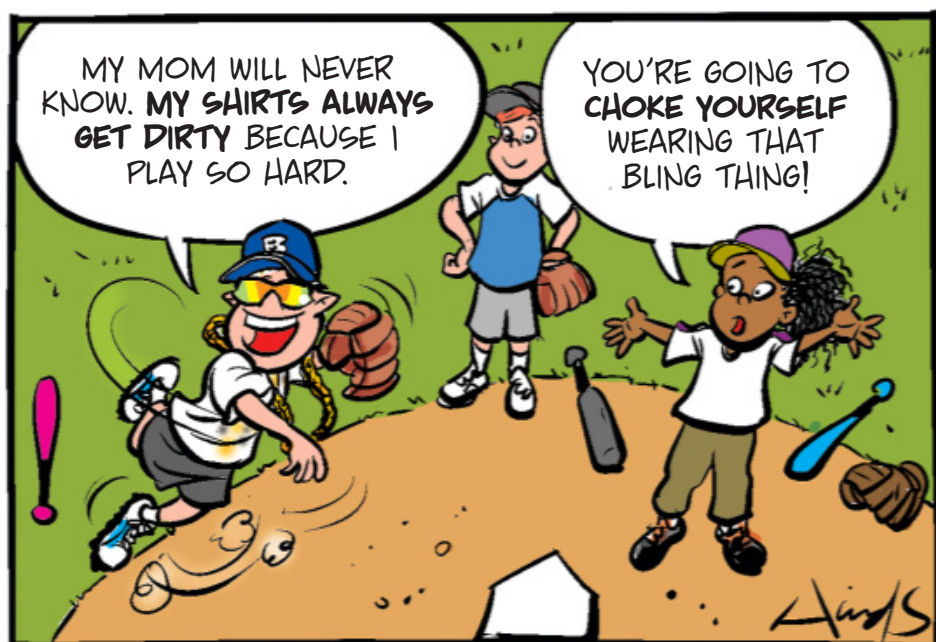
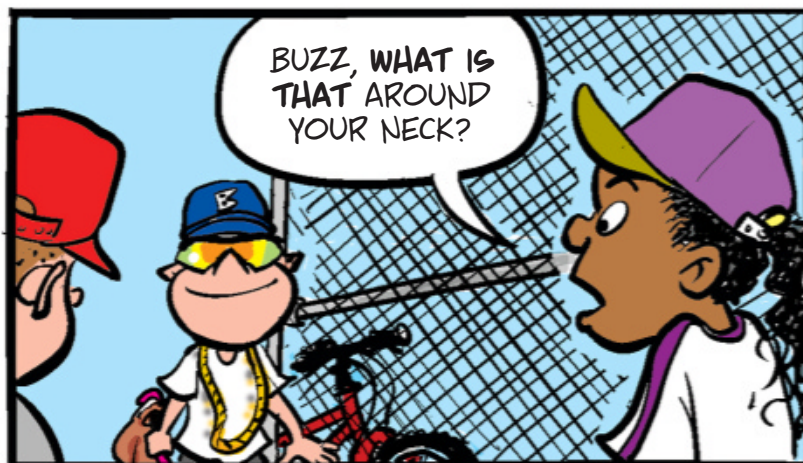
Filip Forsberg, right wing,
Nashville Predators



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By Bill Hinds





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